

Edward L. Wheeler's GREAT DETECTIVE STORY of the Quaker City.



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An advertisement for the book "The Sleuths of Philadelphia" by El Wheeler. The title "KELLEY, HICKEY & CO." is at the top in a large, stylized font. Below it, "THE SLEUTHS OF PHILADELPHIA" is written in a similar font. At the bottom, "By EL WHEELER" is written. Four circular portraits of men are arranged around the central text. The top-left portrait is labeled "JOHN P. KELLEY". The top-right portrait is labeled "EL WHEELER". The bottom-left portrait is labeled "SEVER SAM". The bottom-right portrait is labeled "DAN J. HICKEY". The background of the advertisement is a dark, textured area with a central light-colored path leading towards the portraits.

Kelley, Hickey & Company,

The Sleuths of Philadelphia;

OR,

SATAN'S SOCIAL.

A Thrilling Real Life Romance of the
Centennial City.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK," "DENVER
DOLL," "BOSS BOB," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

HICKEY PICKS UP A TRAIL.

ONE noonday in August, 1882, two men stood in front of the Ridgway House, opposite the Camden ferry-house, at the foot of Market street, Philadelphia.

Both were young, probably twenty-three and twenty-six years of age, respectively.

Their position, as they stood in conversation, seemed to indicate that they had met by chance.

The elder was rather tall and portly, with a dark, handsome face, which, withal, wore a sinister expression; a thick black mustache adorned his lip, and eyes of veriest jet looked from beneath the rim of his polished silk hat.

His dress was rich and of fashionable cut, set off with a lavish display of jewelry, and a judge of human character would have pronounced him of that class which furnishes our gamblers, sporting-fraternity, and aspirant politicians.

The younger man was quite unlike the one addressing him. He was well-built, in an athletic sense; was of blonde complexion, with light-brown hair and eyes, and a slight but graceful mustache, and was handsomer than the other, for his face wore a frank, open expression, and his eyes sparkled with good-nature.

He was attired in a neat business-suit, and wore no jewelry except a watch and chain.

If there was any relationship between the two it was not perceptible in their bearing, or in resemblance.

"Hillo, Floyd—where away now?" the elder party had said at their meeting. "You're a dull sort of fellow. We never see you around Sansom street any more."

"No, I don't roam about much!" answered Floyd. "The fact is, I haven't time; then, too, I have even less inclination than time."

"Pshaw! You'll be a bachelor at twenty-five if you don't stir about. I hear old Banker has had you promoted to chief clerkship?"

"To my surprise, yes. I had never thought of such a thing."

"Queer old crank is uncle, or my name ain't Jack Fallon. The idea of intrusting so large a business to an inexperienced person proves that the old fellow must be losing his business wit."

"I fail to understand you, sir. Am I not as well fitted for the position as any one else?"

"Oh! perhaps"—with a sneer. "Of course it is none of my business; as the old man shipped me for helping myself out of a little gambling debt, I should have nothing to say. I saw him this morning, however, and he seemed more lenient. I heard a bit of news, too."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. The old fellow has made his will."

"I don't see anything extraordinary about that. He is getting old, and his health is very poor; so that it is advisable, I should say, to make preparations for the disposal of his large property."

"Maybe. I suppose you are expecting a large bite from the melon?"

"By no means. I expect and desire nothing in this life, which I do not honestly earn."

"Bah! Independence is a good point in the game of bluff, but in the game of gold it is mere truck. You expect a bite; Belle Banker will come in for a share; and I naturally have a weather eye on a competency, at least."

Ernest Floyd glanced at his watch.

"Well, I have no aspirations, except to attend to my duties, and I hope uncle may live many years."

"You don't believe that he will?"

"Hardly."

"What reasons have you to think that he will not?"

"None in particular, except that he has sent for Miss Belle to come home."

"Pnew! When?"

"To-morrow night. I am to meet her at Gloucester, in the Sylph—uncle's yacht."

"Have you ever met her, so that you would know her?"

"I fancy so. She spent the summer, two years ago, at father's farm, near Haverford College."

And a thoughtful expression stole over young Floyd's face, as he spoke—which Jack Fallon noticed with a scowl, and averted his face, that his evil expression might not be detected by his cousin.

"Well, I am glad she is coming," he said, a moment later. "We used to be the best of friends, and she can easily help me to a partnership with the old gent. By the way, what hour is she to arrive?"

"She will reach Gloucester about dusk, and I will be there to meet her."

"Well, give her Jack's kindest regards. By the way, won't you take a run over to Ridgway Park? I have to meet an acquaintance there, this P. M."

"No, thanks; I must get back to the store. I should have been there some minutes ago."

"Well, by-by! Give my love to Belle, and tell her I will embrace the first opportunity to see her."

The twain then separated, young Floyd hurrying away up Market street, and Jack Fallon sauntering leisurely along Front street, toward Wharf 32.

Standing unobserved in the doorway of the Ridgway House, a third party had been a listener to the foregoing conversation. He was of athletic build and fine frame, his every move betraying quickness and nerve; in face he was rather prepossessing, but not to say handsome, with clean-cut, firmly-molded features shrewd brown eyes, and a pleasant mouth, shaded by a light mustache. His hair was curly, and the head it covered was one that looked capable of holding a deal of common-sense. A plain suit of blue, and a straw hat gave him the appearance of an ordinary business man, but that he was more than all this, the future of our romance will show.

While slowly puffing at a cigar, he had watched the two cousins and listened to their conversation with considerable interest. Especially did his keen gaze rest upon the sinister face of Jack Fallon, noting its every expression.

When the twain separated, the listener's gaze still followed Fallon, until he was lost to view, in the crowd.

"So Jack Fallon is back again, eh?" he muttered. "He is as bold as a lion, too, notwithstanding there are several little charges that would land him in Moya. He is going over to Ridgway to meet an acquaintance, eh? I wonder what's in the wind?"

Involuntarily he left the doorway of the hotel, and sauntered in the direction Fallon had gone. His brows were knitted in perplexity, and he was evidently trying to recall something he had heard, but which had slipped his memory.

"Kelley told me something not long ago, which connected Jack Fallon with the Bankers—ah! I have it! Fallon was head clerk in the establishment, with a prospect of becoming junior partner. Just in the nick of time it was discovered that he had embezzled a considerable sum of money from his employer, to square up a Sansom street gambling-debt. When discovered, he made good the amount, and the matter dropped. Humph! he's a shark out of water, and if he isn't in for some mischief, to-day, I shall be surprised."

Continuing his stroll, he reached the Ridgway pier just as the boat had steamed off for the notorious resort.

Ridgway Park, I may as well add, for the benefit of my readers who are not acquainted in and about the Quaker City, is an island in the middle of the Delaware opposite the foot of Chestnut street. It comprises several acres of level, tree-shaded surface, and boasts of a restaurant, music-stand, bath-houses, and many catchpenny affairs that go to make up the summer resort of the period. In the earlier hours of each day, it is the haven of many German families of respectability; but after mid-afternoon it fills up with a mass of humanity of every kind, and the signs of 'beware of pick-pockets' but faintly suggest what types of character make the pleasant spot their rendezvous until late at night.

Being located between two States—Pennsylvania and New Jersey, law and order would be

wholly a dead letter did not the management provide a squad of special police to prevent actual violence or riot.

Detectives look here for their game, very often; and find it, too.

And it is not the criminal class only who come here, but the heads of some of the first families can often be seen quaffing beer or wine with persons they would blush to be seen with the on main-land.

Dan Hickey, private detective, who had followed in the wake of Jack Fallon, well knew that Fallon seldom frequented this resort, so a suspicion naturally arose in his mind, that some important reason existed for his present visit.

Ever on the alert, Dan resolved to investigate.

While waiting upon the pier for the boat to return, a hand tapped him upon the arm, and turning about, he found himself confronted by a little, shriveled-up specimen of humanity, attired in rags and armed with a boot-lack's outfit.

If ever a great city boasted a genuine street gamin, the boy before the detective was one. He was probably between twelve and thirteen years of age, although he looked younger on account of his short stature. His face was one of intelligence beyond his years, his eyes sharp and sagacious, and his mouth, of goosy size wore a waggish expression, even when it was not distorted with a mischievous grin.

If the rag-houses of the Quaker City could have produced a suit composed of a greater amount of tatters, patches and dirt, it might have been put to good use in a museum.

This was Sewer Sam—"with a history longer than the tail of seventy cats," as he often remarked—and he was the junior member of the great private detective trio of Kelley, Hickey & Co., with whom we have to deal in this most veracious tale.

Sewer Sam was, ostensibly, a bootblack, with by-play of searching sewers for valuables, running errands, and beating his way through the world as best he could. In reality he was the ferret of the firm, and by the senior members considered invaluable.

He was witty, saucy even to impudence, fearless, cunning, and united with all a good judgment beyond his years.

A smile lit up the face of Dan Hickey at sight of the boy.

"Well, Sam, my boy, where have you been these last couple of days?" he asked. "You're lookin' as clean as a fairy."

"Down in the main sewer!" the gamin grinned. "Sum feller tried to kick me because I called him the dude, an' I blacked his right observatory fer him, an' slid down a culvert. Got a leetle too far to ketch myself, an' so thort I might jest as well go down inter the main."

"You'll get your neck broken one of these times, my boy."

"Nary, while whalebones grow from eatin' ham an' eggs. What's yer disturbance, down here!"

"Oh! I'm scenting that 'rounder,' Jack Fallon?"

"Shol the feller w'at spoiled the mug of Stub Maginness, last 'lection? That 'ur?"

"The same. Have you any change?"

"No. Spent the last red fer a consumptive clam. Tell yer the sewer's better fer bone up yer appetite than a bottle o' Schenck's Bitters. I git ten cents per dozen, every time I reckermend Schenck."

"Bah! You are getting to be an inveterate liar, Sam. You hang about here until Fallon comes over, and then shadow him."

"Fer how long?"

"All night and to-morrow."

"But where's the clug to come in?"

"The what?"

"The frog's cyebrows—mutton's mind—wegetables, *entrées à la mud*, an' sich like—or, usin' Webster, the hash!"

"Oh! I'd forgotten that you ever eat anything. Here's a dollar. Now, mind your trap and keep your eyes open."

Sam seized the dollar, with avidity, and skurried across the street, where, in less than five minutes, he was pummeling a larger urchin than himself, who had ordered him off the beat.

Paying no further attention to him, Dan Hickey walked down the pier to the boat, which had just arrived, and in a few minutes afterward, with a hundred others, was landed at Ridgway Park.

The spacious grounds were well filled, and seats at tables were at a premium. The lager flowed freely, and the gabble of the multitude made rude discord with the operatic music, furnished by the excellent band.

Hickey did not walk around much, but, leaning carelessly against a tree, allowed his keen gaze to rove over the scene.

It did not take him long to discover Jack Fallon. He was seated on the balcony of the restaurant, and no one was immediately near him.

He must therefore be waiting.

Being unknown to the man, Hickey ascended to the balcony, and took a seat directly in Fallon's rear, ordered a beer, and to all intents, gradually dozed off into a sound sleep, but, though his eyes were closed, he never was more wide awake.

A full hour passed and Fallon grew very restless, judging by his uneasy movements.

Hickey became none the less impatient; but just then he heard Fallon speak:

"Ah! is that you, Kitty? You are late, my dear. Be seated!"

"I could not get here sooner, sir. I had several errands to do."

"What were they?"

"Well, sir, you see the master is taken worse, and I had to go let Mr. Floyd know, so he could telegraph for Miss Belle to meet him at Glo'ster, to-night, sir."

"So the fellow is going, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Curse it! This change is unfortunate! Is the old man really very much worse?"

"So the doctors say."

Fallon was silent a moment.

When he spoke, it was huskily.

"Well, did you find out if a telegram was sent to Banker or not?"

"It was sent."

"Was it answered?"

"No. Butler says he threw it in the fire, at the master's request."

"Curses on him! Well, the only way to deal with the old dolt, is by strategy, and there is little time to work. You don't know in whose charge the will was placed?"

"No, sir."

"Who attends him?"

"Butler—constantly."

"Can he be bribed?"

"No. He is as faithful as a sleuth-hound, on a trail."

"Thank fortune I've none of those after me. Is any one admitted to the room?"

"No one but the doctor and Master Ernest."

"Curses on that fellow! I have something pickling for him. Come. I will see you as far as the shore; then, I have work to do!"

CHAPTER II.

KELLEY'S CRUISE.

THEY left the balcony together, and went down to the landing, where they were in time to have taken the boat for Philadelphia; but Dan Hickey, ever vigilant, perceived that they did not ride across, but stood on the landing until the boat was gone, when the girl, a pretty young woman of seventeen, shook her clinched fist at Fallon, and made several other angry gesticulations, showing that she was out of temper.

Hickey quickly left the balcony, and by the time he reached the ground below, they were passing him.

"I tell you it will not be possible for me to marry you to-night," Fallon was saying, in a low, earnest tone, as they became seated. "I know I promised you, but then, I've got to see to important business to-night, out of which, if I am successful, I can make tens of thousands of dollars."

"It matters not if it were tens of millions!" the young woman replied, with flashing eyes, and not at all careful to guard her tones. "You have made me your tool long enough. Now you have the choice of marrying me, or I will turn and let the cat out of the bag!"

"You dare not!" he hissed, a look of desperation coming over his face.

"Try me and see!" she replied, sweetly sarcastic. "I fancy you do not know what you are talking about, sir."

"Don't I? Well, maybe not."

He drummed on the table a moment, meditatively.

"There is but one way I know of, whereby I can humor your whim," he said. "I have a party to meet about dark, and my business can be transacted in a couple of hours, so that I can meet you at Nineteenth and Spruce, at ten o'clock, sharp. Will that answer your purpose? There is a minister handy, and it won't take long to tie the knot."

"Do you solemnly promise to be there, Jack Fallon?"

"I solemnly do promise to be there at the appointed time."

"Very well. You know the consequences if you are not!"

"I have promised you. That's all that is necessary. Come; let's go."

The next boat took them back to Philadelphia, as it also did Detective Hickey, who, after seeing the pair separate, and Sewer Sam skulk away on the trail of Fallon, made his way uptown, his mind busy in digesting the sum and substance of what he had heard.

That there was some heinous plot which involved Joshua Banker, or his daughter, Belle, now seemed assured, and Dan Hickey was not the man to close his eyes against any piece of villainy that his earnest efforts could baffle. To evil doers he was justly known as a "terror." It was his success as a sleuth, and partly owing to the fact that he could not be bribed, that made him and his partners unpopular with the regular force of the city, as well as other private "investigating" concerns.

Slowly and surely, however, the "trade" came to the new firm, and their patronage grew to be both extensive and profitable.

John P. Kelley, the senior member, held a ward constableness, and was also engaged in mercantile pursuits, and only took an active part whenever Hickey or Sewer Sam were in need of help, of a legal or executive nature—which Kelley could furnish at a moment's notice, as he was solid with the mayor and chief of police. He frequently assumed personal charge of a case, and invariably carried it through in a satisfactory manner.

Whenever idle, the trio had a rendezvous in the front room of an otherwise tenantless house, on Sansom street; and it was to this retreat that Dan Hickey took his way, after leaving Ridgway pier.

A rap upon the rickety door elicited a hearty "Come in!" from the interior, and the detective entered, and closed the door behind him.

The room was plainly but neatly furnished—everything in the arrangements, however, indicating the absence of a woman's hand.

Seated in an easy-chair, with his heels elevated upon a table, was a powerfully-built man, spare of flesh, but large-boned and brawny.

His face was rather long, with heavy jowls, a firm chin, and high cheek-bones, and the seams upon it told that life had not all been a rose-walk to him—that bitter experience had in a measure steeled him to a degree approaching recklessness.

It was an honest face, with penetrating brown eyes, a firm mouth, shaded by a sandy mustache; it was a face that an honest man in trouble could look into, and not find there an evidence of selfishness and avarice.

He was rather plainly attired, and seemed to be taking full enjoyment of his sole companion—a huge meerschaum pipe.

"Hello, old boy!" he cried, stretching forth his massive hand as the detective entered.

"How's the wind?"

"Fair to good!" Hickey replied. "At your pipe, I see!"

"What else is left for a fellow, with nothing to do, and nothing to pass away time? Fetch out the gloves, and I'll box your ears for you—anything to stir me up."

Hickey laughed quietly.

"No scrappin' to-day, John. There's business on hand."

"Of course there is. Johnny Clark and Arthur Chambers have both been here after you."

"Chambers and Clark be hanged! It's too hot weather to put on the gloves—wait till October and I'll knock 'em both out. I've something to tell you."

"Not a bit of it. I know just what you are going to say."

"What?"

"You mean to tell that it has been discovered that there is a powerfully-organized gang of sneak-thieves working the stores, and that you've a notion we can capture the boodle."

"Nothing of the kind. I've struck the snake-trail to a case that will yield bigger results. You know Joshua Banker, the big wool-merchant of Kensington?"

"Yes, very well," and Kelley—for this was he—looked rather grim as he made the answer.

"Why do you speak so doubtfully?" Dan asked.

"Because I know a few things that no one else knows. But never mind what they are. What of Banker?"

"He is dying."

"Well, is there anything remarkable about that? We have all got to go through the same mill—the sooner the better for some of us."

"There is something remarkable. Banker is a man of considerable wealth, is he not?"

"I should judge he might be a safe man on a half-a-million bond."

"So I have heard. Well, he has a daughter, has he not?"

"Yes, she has been off down in Jersey somewhere, finishing her studies under some foreign professor."

"Studying the anatomy of watermelons, eh? Well, now, it appears there are two nephews—one Floyd, now chief-clerk in Banker's establishment, and that scaly individual, Jack Fallon."

"Humph! I hunted him out of the State last winter."

"But he is back again. Saw him jolting Floyd to-day. Followed him, and heard his conversation with a woman whom he called Kitty. Heard enough to cause me to know that Kitty is his spy in the Banker mansion, and I believe there is some deep plot afoot by which Fallon calculates to step into a share of the Banker's million, if not the whole of it."

Hickey went on to relate in full what he had heard, seen, and done, his partner listening with his usual severe expression without opening his lips, except to emit a puff of smoke.

"There! what's your idea of the case?" Dan asked, when he had finished. "Don't it look as if it were to be a case of foul play?"

"If Jack Fallon is in any way connected with it, rest assured there is some devil's work afoot. Think it over for awhile, and await Sam's return. That young rat is as sly as they make 'em, and we might knock about for a week and find out less in that time than he would in a day."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I've a little constable business to do, down at No. — Pine street; then I'll come back."

"Let's see—that's the place where Shannon was knifed, eh?"

"The same. The place bears a good name, as far as respectability is concerned, but there is undoubtedly something crooked about it, and were poor Ned Shannon's lips unsealed by death, to-day, he could likely a tale of mystery unfold. If four months' rent are not forthcoming, to-day, I'll endeavor to penetrate some of the mysteries of the place."

"Well, take care of yourself, and I'll ruminate over the probabilities and possibilities of the Banker case."

"You can wager that John P. don't often get left!" the senior partner smiled, and left the room.

An hour later, he rung the door-bell of an imposing residence on Pine street, near the heart of the city, and quietly awaited an answer to the summons.

A colored boy directly opened the door.

"Missus amn't in?" he said, stiffly, without waiting for the detective to speak.

"Get out, you scorched monkey!" And Kelley pushed the lad aside, entered the vestibule, and from there stepped into the elegantly-furnished hall.

"Where's the boss of the place?" turning threateningly on the negro. "Speak up, or I'll make a door mat of you!"

A side door opened, and a woman's voice said, falteringly:

"This way, sir; did you wish to see me?"

Kelley pushed the door open, and passed into a parlor, which, in its magnificence of furnishing, was very noticeable.

A woman, robed in a wrapper of creamy silk, stood in the center of the apartment, regarding Kelley with flashing orbs—a wondrously handsome and well-preserved woman of nearly forty years, though she looked even younger, beneath the gaslight of a dazzling chandelier.

Jewels gleamed upon her hair, upon her fair hands, and at her throat, and her dusky eyes seemed to scintillate with brilliancy akin to the magnificent diamonds she wore.

Kelley paused respectfully, just within the door, hat in hand, while his gaze studied her face searchingly, for an instant, that was sufficient.

It was a face in which were written deceit, cunning, treachery, and passion.

"Excuse my intrusion, madam," Kelley said, "but my business of constable requires me to be a little forcible in making my calls, sometimes. Do you recognize me?"

"I do not, sir—I—I—"

And the woman flushed, angrily, and patted her pretty slippered foot upon the floor.

"You do recognize me. I am John P. Kelley."

at your service. You are Lucille La Verd, alias Lucy Larkins, formerly of Piper's Court. By my soul, people and circumstances do change! You recollect I once got you out of the central station on bail, and you sloped! Only cost me five hundred, you know; but then, such little things are mere trifles, so to speak. I often use a fiver for a cigar-lighter. But, I say, you seem to be driving gayly, here. How would you like to help your landlord along to the tune of about four hundred dollars?"

"Sir! Your intrusion is unpardonable. Leave my house!"

"Show me a paid-up mortgage and a clear deed, ma'am, and nothing will please me better than to oblige you."

"Will you not go, sir?"

"Will you pay the back rent?"

"I will not."

"Then, your three months' notice and three days' grace, having expired, I will make a levy on the contents of this house, and advertise them for sale; and more—I will watch to see that nothing is removed. Let me see—I might as well begin with this room."

"Stop! stop! This shall go no further. Give me a receipt for what is due."

Kelley at once extracted a receipt from his pocket, and she handed him a roll of bills which counted up the exact amount.

"Now, sir, can I be rid of your presence, that your errand is done?" she demanded haughtily.

"Most assuredly you can!" he replied, "although I could almost wish you had not paid the rent. I've an innate curiosity to explore the place where poor Ned Shannon lost his life. However, I will postpone the matter until another time. I will bid you adieu!"

The sound of carriage wheels halting before the door, caused her to start and grow pale.

"Quick!" she gasped, hurrying Kelley forcibly out into the hall. "You must make your exit by the back way!"

She pushed him through the hall into a rear dining room, where a burly negro was lounging.

"Tom!" she said, excitedly. "You see that this gentleman makes his exit by way of the rear alley. Mind now!"

She then flitted away, closing the door after her.

Tom arose, importantly.

"Right 'long froo de rear, boss. Git out, sah!" he ordered.

But Kelley offered not to stir. Instead, he quickly drew a revolver in one hand, and a ten-dollar note in the other, and exhibited it in plain view.

"See here, nigger; I'm not going an inch out of this house at present. D'ye want that money to make you sit down there and be as dumb and inactive as a mule, or will you have the contents of this revolver?"

"Git out! Go 'way dar! None ob youh foolin' roun' dis house! Jes' you pick up your feet an' trabble, or I'll frow you out. I'se not 'fraid ob no weapings, 'ca'se I know you dasn't shoot, heer. I doesn't take no money, but I does perlitely inwite you into de back yard, an' uff you dont go I swear to sorgham I'se gwine make a heap lot trouble fo' you. Guess you don't know dat I'se a brudder ob Black Sam, de slugger?"

"I don't care who you are. See that—I'm a detective! Now, will you act sensible or not?"

"My orders am to show you out, sah!"

"But I won't go."

"Den I fro' you out!"

The negro, who was a very giant in size, made a sudden and remarkable spring forward, and it seemed as if he was bound to clinch with Kelley; but with lightning quickness, the con-able's iron fist shot out with terrible force, and caught Thomas on the neck under the right ear, and down the darky went, to the carpeted floor, heavily.

No noise resulted, and seeing the back yard from the window of the room he dragged the senseless form out and dumped it there insensibie—the terrific blow having knocked the darky clean out. Then Kelley glided back toward the parlor in the confident expectation of "hearing something to his advantage."

CHAPTER III.

YOUNG FLOYD'S SECRET.

LET us follow the footsteps of Dan Hickey, for, restless as a panther, he did not long remain at their rendezvous after Kelley had departed.

A suspicion that some evil might befall young Floyd sent him at once to the great woolen

goods warehouse of Joshua Banker, in Kensington, a northern portion of the city.

It was after six o'clock when he reached the warehouse, and the hands had all departed for their homes, except Floyd and the janitor, who were standing on the steps engaged in conversation.

Hickey waited at a respectful distance until Floyd came down to the street, when he approached closer and tipped his hat.

"Excuse me, sir, but have I the honor of meeting Mr. Ernest Floyd?"

"Floyd is my name, sir," the head clerk, or more properly, the business manager replied, promptly. "Do you wish to see me?"

"I would like to have a brief interview with you—yes, sir—if you can spare me the time."

"Very well; walk inside. I have but a few moments' leisure, but will place them at your command."

He led the way into the office, closed the door, and they became seated.

"Now, sir, if you will be brief, it will oblige me. I have an uncle very ill and also an errand to perform in his behalf."

"So I am aware. I accidentally overheard your conversation with Jack Fallon this afternoon. Allow me to introduce myself—my name is Dan J. Hickey."

"Hickey! Oh, you are the clever teacher of sparring?"

"The same; also this," and turning up the collar of his vest he revealed a gold detective's badge.

Ernest Floyd started, grew pale and uttered a little gasp.

"A detective—you! I never knew this before. What do you want with me?"

"Nothing more than a confidential interview, in which I expect you to give all the information you are able to do."

"I fail to understand what you are driving at, sir."

"You will become gradually enlightened as I proceed. It has come to my observation in the past few hours that your uncle, your cousin Belle and yourself are likely to become entangled in the meshes of an intricate scheme, which may, or may not, involve you in a great deal of trouble."

"Indeed! Who is at the bottom of this scheme you hint at?"

"One who is not over fond of you, I calculate."

"You mean Jack Fallon?"

"Possibly. He has, undoubtedly, a hand in the matter, but you know we can't always judge on first indications. There may be others in the background who are using him as their instrument."

"True. But go on."

"Well, I believe there's deviltry brewing, and my profession of detective demands that I should investigate the case and right what wrongs I can. Now, I want to ask you some brief questions, and you will consult the interest of yourself and those you esteem as relatives by giving direct answers. Joshua Banker is reported to be dying?"

"He is."

"Of what malady?"

"Supposedly an inward cancer, although none of the medical fraternity thus far summoned feel satisfied as to whether it is a cancer or not."

"How long has he been ill?"

"He has complained of an inward trouble for three months, but it is only within the past three days that he has been bed-ridden and considered dangerous."

"Who are the members of his household exclusive of yourself?"

"A young negro girl, Kitty, the maid of all work, and Butler, my uncle's attendant."

"What sort of a man is Butler?"

"Quiet, close-mouthed, and devoted to his master, a man of forty, and 'tis said a boon companion of uncle, since boyhood."

"What of Kitty?"

"I know little about her, but my impression would be that she is crafty, subtle, and possibly revengeful."

"Your opinion coincides with mine. Does Jack Fallon visit the Banker residence?"

"Not at all. He lied, when he said, this afternoon, that he had been there. He is emphatically denied admission to the house."

"You enjoy your uncle's confidence?"

"To a certain extent, yes. He is not a man to reveal all his affairs to any one."

"You understand he has made his will?"

"I do. At least, a lawyer was summoned, and I judge it was to do the job."

"Then, do you know who this lawyer is?"

"I do not, nor can I find out."

"If a will was drawn, who witnessed the signature?"

"Two men accompanied him, I believe."

Hickey took a book from his pocket, and wrote in it, for several minutes.

"Now, then," he said directly, "how do the books of the establishment stand, to date?"

"Something wonderful to say, they could be in no better state. I have labored hard, and to-night there is not exceeding ten thousand dollars standing out, all of which is amply secured, the stock is paid up, and inventoried, and the bank account tallies cent for cent with the books, from the hour I took charge."

Hickey looked at the young man, in admiration.

"Now, about this daughter of Banker's. You know her?"

"I have met her!"

"What are your relations toward one another?"

Floyd did not answer, immediately. His gaze was bent upon the floor, his face was pale, and he seemed agitated by unusual emotion.

Hickey watched him keenly. He saw that he had stumbled upon another secret. What might it not amount to?

"You will excuse me!" Floyd stammered, looking up confusedly, a moment later. "I occasionally have these spells."

"Well, the best way for you to cure them, I should judge, would be to select the proper weapon, and pop—the question. Come! out with it! I must know all or nothing, in this case."

"Sir, can I trust you, with what I have hitherto held as a dead secret?"

"You can."

"Then, I will explain. Two years ago, the past Spring, I returned home to my father's country seat, near Haverford College, after an absence of two years in the West. On my arrival, I met one of the most charming of young ladies, whom my good parents introduced to me as my cousin, from Philadelphia—Miss Belle Banker. Of course I was delighted to meet her, and to have a lively companion with whom to pass away the dull summer days. Our acquaintance soon ripened into friendship, and from that into love. I fairly worshiped her, and she seemed to reciprocate my affection."

"Autumn arrived. I resolved to come to the city to try my luck, and one day proposed marriage to her, and told her of my resolve. She approved my resolution, but preferred to wait awhile before marrying. I would not hear to this, and she finally consented to marry me on these conditions: After we were wed, I was to go to the city, and apply for a position in uncle's employ, and after I had won his favor, she would come forward, and we would declare our union. I was never to mention her name, for fear uncle would be prejudiced against me. After we were declared man and wife before him, I previously having won his confidence, she was positive and sure that everything would be all right."

"Well, we were married secretly, and after a short honeymoon I came here, and was welcomed into uncle's employ at a good salary. I worked hard to please and succeeded."

"One evening, a month after I came here, he brought a beautiful girl into the parlor and introduced her to me as my cousin, Belle. Great God! you can never know my feelings, sir, when a glance discovered to me that she was not the woman I had married! They were as like as two peas—I doubt if the whole world could produce two girls more alike—yet, from the instant she entered my presence, that night, I knew she was not my Belle!"

"What happened next I do not know, more than that weeks later I arose from a bed of sickness, a mere wreck of my former self. Delirium fever I had had, I was told."

"I have a faint recollection that during my sickness this queenly girl was my nurse, but when I arose to be about again she was gone. I did not ask where—I did not dare to; and, best of all, uncle never questioned me. If I betrayed anything in my delirium, I was never made the wiser for it, to this day."

"Have you never heard from the false Belle Banker?"

"Never, further than that I understand she left the farm about the time my uncle's daughter came home. In the past year uncle has shown me several of Belle's letters, written from boarding-school. She always inquires about my health, but that's all."

"And this is the girl you are going to meet to-night?"

"I suppose so. I'd rather be shot than meet

her, but it is uncle Joshua's wish, and that is law to me."

Hickey laughed.

"If you are as shy of the sex as I am, I can well understand your feelings. I generally let my chum, Kelley, attend to 'em."

"Well, I guess you will have to excuse me now. I shall have barely time to attend to what I want to."

"Very well. This is altogether a deeper case than I anticipated, and the depth is not reached yet. But if Kelley, Hickey & Co. can't do the job up fine, no one else can. A few more questions and you can go. Do you have access to your uncle's room?"

"At all times. I generally go in and stay with him while Butler gets his meals."

"Very well. Do you feel positive you can trust me?"

"If I hadn't I would not have told you what I have."

"Can you go home before supper?"

"That is my intention."

"What is your influence with Butler?"

"He thinks a great deal of me."

"Good! Now will you do me a favor?"

"Yes."

"Then wait here five minutes."

He hurried down the street and disappeared around the first corner.

In five minutes he was back, and gave Floyd a small vial.

"Give that to Butler!" he said, "and order him to administer a teaspoonful to the patient, and to see to it that nothing else except water passes his lips to-night!"

"What is it for?"

"To make him vomit!"

Floyd looked pale, and fairly staggered.

"My God! you do not suspect poisoning?" he gasped.

"Do as I have told you, and we will see how the patient feels to-morrow!" Dan answered, curtly. "Be off now, or you will be late. I'll see you again."

He then boarded a car, and rode away, leaving Ernest, for the moment too astonished to act.

While Hickey chuckled to himself.

Sam Severn, alias Sewer Sam, did not have far to shadow Jack Fallon, after he left Ridgeway pier, for the schemer went at once to the residence of Lucille La Verd, on Pine street, where he was admitted without delay.

Sam watched his entrance, from across the street, with a speculative squint of one eye, as he propped himself up on a marble carriage block.

"So that's where Jacky slings forth, eh?" he muttered. "That's the crooked shebang w'at K lley's bin scentin' for some time. Axerently heerd one o' Miller & Sharkey's men speak o' it t'other day. 'Pears like every one 'spects ther place, since Shannon got killed there. Wonder what Jacky's lay is thar? S'pose I'll have to hang out here till he comes out."

A few minutes afterward a person came rapidly up the street, and Sam, with an eye to business, arose to his feet, box in hand; but the moment he saw what was coming, he sunk back again, with a sniff of disgust.

The new-comer was of that animated species of humanity which it has pleased the people to call "the dude."

He was attired in the tightest of tight clothing, and laced with corsets; his sallow countenance was adorned with a gosling mustache; his hair was banged over his forehead, and an eye-glass over one eye completed his "dude" make-up, unless we except the silk tie he wore, the lavender kids, and a poodle-dog he led by a string.

He cast a supercilious glance at Sewer Sam as he approached, and was about passing, when he suddenly chanced to remember something, and paused.

"Se beah, youngster! How much will you charge to black me up?" he asked, with an affected yawn.

"Charge a quarter to high-toned gent's as kin afford it," Sam replied. "Orter ax more fer number 'evens, 'cause they ain't goin' ter reduce ther revenue on blackin'; but you look purty two-three, so I'll ease up on ye, and say a quarter."

"But, my deah sonny, you don't weally take me to be so green! I newah pay more than five cents at my own summer residence in West Philadelphia."

"All right! Put out your quoit; I'll give a mirror finish."

"But, sonny, deah, I was just going to explain that I was so u fortunate as to blow in

my purse at a private game of poker, and I am short just two cents. If you will wait for the sum I will be here at ten to-morrow."

"Reckon I ain't takin' on no tick, bud'y," Sam replied, putting away his brushes. "Better tackle somebody as hain't had a job for a week."

"You saucy boy! I've a mind to set my dog on you!"

"Ye don't call *that* a dorg, do ye?" Sam queried, with a snort of laughter. "Why, that's nothin' but a young skunk!"

"How dare you, sir? I'll have you know who you are saucing! I am George Agrippus Imlay, of West Philadelphia, and one of the bloods, too. Now, sir, you must apologize!"

"How are ye, blood? Me apologize, an' to a sick lookin' dude like you? Waal, I guess not! Ef ye want them dirt-disturbers polished up so ye can see yer conscience in 'em, why, give us a nickel, or else waltz off, an' let the wind blow ye away."

The dude was about to make some angry retort, when a window of the house across the street was thrown up, and a voice called out through the inside blinds, in French:

"Away! away! What are you about? To the tryst!"

Imlay made no sign that he understood what was said, but gave a black scowl at Sewer Sam and hurried on up the street.

Sam started after him, with a prolonged whistle of surprise.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ABDUCTION.

LET us return and follow the movements of Kelley, whom we left in Lucille La Verd's residence.

Leaving the kitchen after dumping the senseless negro into the yard, he crept toward the parlor door as noiselessly as a cat, and there, dropping to the floor, listened, eager to know who Lucille's visitor was, and what was his errand.

At first there was no audible sound within the parlor, but finally Lucille spoke.

"I hardly expected you to-day, sir. I supposed you were away at the sea-shore."

"Little danger of going *there*!" the unmistakable voice of Jack Fallon growled. "There's to be a session of Satan's Social at midnight to-night, and that, with other business, demands my presence in town. Most important of all, is our little matter. Old Banker is on his last legs, and has made his will. Belle comes home to-night."

"Then, after all, we are foiled."

"By no means. There is a better opening now than ever. Have you given Madge the talking to you promised?"

"Yes, and she now sees the good sense of my argument. She will marry you without fail."

"Good! Now, then, in the first place she must understand that there is work to be done. To-night at dusk Belle Banker is to be met at Gloucester ferry by Ernest Floyd and brought over in the yacht; but *she must not come over.*"

"How is it to be prevented?"

"Easily. She will reach the ferry an hour before Floyd arrives with the yacht. I will be on hand and inform her that it was impossible for Floyd to come for her with the boat, and that I will take her by carriage to Camden, cross the ferry, and thence home. She will of course be only too glad to accept, knowing that her father is at the point of death. I'll chloroform her after we get a little way into the country, and take her to a safe place I have in view, where she will be secure."

"Well? What then?"

"Simply this. Madge will be in Gloucester when I leave, to take the place of the original Belle Banker. Their resemblance is too perfect for detection, and Madge can just as well become old Banker's heir as not, and after he dies all our interests will be identical."

"Indeed!"

These words were uttered by a young woman who had, unobserved, entered from an adjoining room. A magnificent beauty she was, with a pretty face, brilliant hazel eyes, and a mouth of rare sweetness; hair of a light-brown color, and a form of sylph-like contour, clad in elegant attire.

There was a peculiar expression of no easy interpretation upon her face as she uttered the single word, "indeed!"

"Ah! my fair Madge—so you have been playing eavesdropper, have you?" and Fallon arose and advanced toward her with extended hands, which she received with a slight flush.

"Tell me, what do you think of my little game all played for your sole benefit?"

"I think you are a remarkable rascal," she replied, with a light laugh; "but I don't know that I should object to your roguery, as long as I profit by it. From what I have heard of your plan I think it will succeed."

"Of course it will. All that is required is for you to play well your part. As soon as you are installed we will be married. I want this distinctly understood before we go any further."

"I will marry you as soon as I am recognized by Joshua Banker as being his daughter!" Madge replied.

"That settles it. Be at Gloucester within two hours in traveling costume, and I will give you all necessary instructions."

"I will be there."

"There is but one obstacle that is likely to be in the way of success," Fallon said, turning to Lucille. "You told me once that your husband, Jim, was your bitter enemy, and ever watching for an opportunity to be revenged on you."

"True, he is. He hates us both, and perhaps not without cause. He came back from California with a fortune. I wanted a share of it, but he would only give me a few dollars at a time. I introduced him to a jolly set of fellows, and got him to drinking and gambling, and seventy-five per cent. of all he spent came to me. In this way Madge and I protected our own rights and to-day Jim Banker is the next thing to an idiot."

Harshly and heartlessly were these words uttered, and even Jack Fallon, wretch that he was, could scarcely repress a shudder at the woman's callousness.

Had either of the trio seen the hideous face of a man, that for an instant arose above the back of a sofa positioned across one corner of the room, they would probably have done more than merely shudder.

The face itself was hideous in features; it was the expression of malignant hatred upon it which made it startling. It was the face of a man whom whisky had made a wreck. The eyes were bloodshot, the heavy beard tangled and matted, and the hair in a like condition.

Shaking his powerful fist at Lucille, the man disappeared behind the sofa to wait and watch.

"You hardly think there will be any danger of his interference, then?" Fallon asked, anxiously.

"Positive of it," madam replied. "If he should interfere, all you have to do is to rap him over the head with a black-jack. Hark!"

There was a sudden and fierce struggle in the hall without, followed by curses, and more noise as of a desperate conflict.

"Merciful heavens! what is the matter?" Lucille demanded, rushing to the door and throwing it open. "Quick, Jack, it's a spy, and Tom is trying to capture him. To his aid, or the fellow will escape."

Locked in a death-like hug were John P. Kelley and the big negro "Throw 'em out" of Lucille's mansion, whom Kelley had previously dumped out in the yard.

The black had remained insensible but a few moments, and with the stealth of a cat had re-entered the house, and pounced upon the detective, who was crouching in a listening attitude, at the parlor door.

Surprised as he was, Kelley had presence of mind enough to grapple with his enemy, and they rolled to the floor in a bear-like hug, so that, being pretty evenly matched in point of strength, it was doubtful which would have come off the victor, had they been left to fight it out by themselves.

But the sudden advent of Jack Fallon on the scene gave it a far different aspect.

"It is Kelley, the detective, and he has been spying on us!" the villain cried, hoarsely. "Ho! ho! this is fortunate! I have been wanting to get even with the bound this many a month!"

"He must not escape from here, or your plans will be ruined!" Lucille exclaimed, eagerly.

"Neither he shall escape!" Fallon hissed. "Hang to him, Tom! Quick, Lucille, get some straps or ropes!"

Both commands were obeyed, and in short order, the detective was bound, and gagged, and could only lay and glare his rage at his captors.

Fallon then glanced at his watch.

"We shall have no time to tarry here," he declared. "You strike for Gloucester at once, Madge, and await at McSorty's—you know where that is. When all is ready you will be given the cue, when you are to repair to the ferry-house, and be ready to meet young Floyd. Act well your part, girl!"

"Never fear," replied Madge.

"You, Lucille, can attend to the disposal of the prisoner, until I get ready to deal with him. Be sure that you do not let him escape."

"I will have him guarded constantly, Jack," she answered, following him to the door.

"See that you do!" and he ran lightly down the steps. "And don't fail to have Madge at Gloucester by at least seven o'clock."

"She will be there. Be careful."

Then the door closed, and Jack Fallon hurried down Pine street, toward the Delaware, his face wearing an expression of mingled anxiety and triumph.

Opposite the "crooked" mansion there was an alley of dark, narrow aspect, which ran back to the next street, and crouching in the shadows of this, Sewer Sam had waited until Fallon came out, and as a consequence, heard his words.

"Goin' ter Glo'ster, hey?" the gamin muttered, scratching away at his frowzy head. "Bat a red-headed bivalve that thar's a rum game on foot, tho' Daavel didn't give me any pointers ter work on. 'Spects I's off fer Glo'ster, too, an' ef thar's any shenanigan, an' I spot out'er it, I'll make the firm come down w' a suit of clothing sech as becomes my figger. Thet aire Fallon luks like a thoroughbred; but he hain't got thet pedigree alongside yours forever, Sewer Sam."

And allowing Fallon to get some distance away, the boy left the alley, and cautiously dogged the arch schemer's footsteps.

He was an expert at shadowing, never having been known to lose a scent, or give up a chase, and this was one thing that made him invaluable to his associates, and which has made him, to-day, the youngest and shrewdest ferret in the Quaker City.

In the ferry-house at Gloucester, a half hour before dusk that night, a young lady was seated, with a traveling-bag beside her, and upon her face was an expression of anxiety and pain, while there was the red of weeping about her eyes.

Occasionally she would rise, go to the water's edge, and eagerly scan the river, with its myriads of sail boats, ferries and larger vessels; but she evidently saw not the one expected, for she would speedily return to her seat with a sigh.

She was enveloped in a gray ulster, and wore a pretty hat upon her head.

In face and figure she was the living image of Madge La Verd; the classic mold of features, the very expression of mouth and eyes, were the same, and it must indeed have been with the eyes of love, if any other person could have distinguished them apart.

Many admiring glances were leveled at the beautiful girl by those in the ferry house; but she paid no attention to any one, her mind evidently being occupied by sad thoughts, for every now and then her lip would quiver, and tears would spring to her eyes.

Her impatience would seem to increase when a ferry-boat would arrive, and depart for Philadelphia, and several times she half-rose, as if resolved to cross upon it; then she would abandon the purpose, and again anxiously scan the river.

"Why does cousin Ernest delay so long, if poor papa is so ill?" she would ask herself, over and over again. "It seems as if they were trying to torture me with suspense."

The dusk was increasing fast, when a close cab was furiously driven up to the ferry-house, and a man leaped out, and approached.

He was attired in the height of fashion, and she felt half-sorry and half-glad, when she saw that it was Jack Fallon.

"My dear cousin!" he cried, approaching her, "how glad I am to find you here. We were afraid you might get impatient, and cross on the ferry. You see, we started after you on the Sylph—Ernest and I—but she capsized, in fact, just off Camden, and Ernest sent me ashore to hire a hack, and bring you to Camden, where he will have the boat righted, all ready to take us to Kensington. I tell you, there was no grass allowed to grow under the horses' feet, for I knew of your great anxiety to get home!"

"Poor papa—tell me of him!" Belle cried, scarcely heeding his chatter.

"He was decidedly better when we left, and the council of doctors were of the opinion that a favorable turn in his case had taken place."

"God be praised for that!"

"Amen to that!" Fallon said fervently. "You have the deepest sympathy of all who know you, cousin. But, come; let's waste no time.

It's a long drive to Market street, Camden, as we have to go out quite a piece into the country to strike good roads on which we can make time."

"Why not cross here, by ferry? We could make good time."

"But, you see, Ernest is waiting for us off Camden; and then, too, this hack must be returned there. Never fear. I secured the fastest team in the city and we won't be long."

Never once suspecting that she was entering a trap Belle Banker accompanied him to the cab and was helped to a seat on the inside, Fallon following her.

"Now, let 'em go, driver!" he ordered, and away the carriage tore at terrific speed.

Belle was cognizant of the trouble between Fallon and her father, but knew nothing further concerning him, save that he had once paid her lovely attentions, which she had so discouraged that he had finally ceased to offer them.

Least of all on such an occasion, did she suspect him of any wrong motive, in coming to meet her.

The heavens were deeply overcast, and it soon became intensely dark.

This was what Fallon wanted.

He waited until they were two miles or more out of Gloucester, when he carefully drew from his pocket a package wrapped in oilskin; then he suddenly sprang upon the innocent girl, and clapped a large sponge, saturated with chloroform, over her face. The package was this prepared sponge.

Despite her struggles, he held her in a vise-like embrace, and she was unable to move or help herself.

The powerful drug soon took effect and in a few minutes she lay limp and apparently lifeless in his arms.

"Holhol! Who says victory is not now mine?" he cried exultantly. "I hold the full winning hand. Madge goes to the Banker mansion, and becomes the heiress to the old man's shakels. I step in, marry her, get control, and live like a king. If she refuses to marry me and give me the reins—but, bah! To balk me would be to brook exposure and get bounced into prison along with her amiable mother. Hal hal Jack Fallon, you're a trump, and it's a chilly morn with frost on the sun when you get left!"

CHAPTER V.

SEWER SAM "TUMBLES."

SCARCELY had the sound of the wheels of Jack Fallon's carriage died away in the neighborhood of Gloucester ferry, when a cab and team, similar in all respects, returned to the ferry, and apparently the same lady who got into the first cab, got out of number two, and entered the ferry house waiting-room.

There were none of those about at the instant who had witnessed Miss Banker's departure, and Madge La Verd's arrival, and thus the rather peculiar circumstance was overlooked.

We say there was none, but we err.

Upon a barrel, outside the ferry-house entrance, looking dirtier and raggeder than ever, was perched no less a personage than Sewer Samuel, "eskwire."

We left him in the act of shadowing Jack Fallon, on Pine street.

He followed him to Gloucester; he saw him hire the hack outside the ferry-house, first having a detailed conversation with the driver; he saw him pay the driver and then saunter away. Directly Fallon came back, got into the cab and was driven away and did not return until he came for Miss Banker.

Sam easily overheard the villain's conversation with the girl, but was not deceived.

"There's a hookey old game afoot sure as preachin'," he mused. "He ain't goin' to take that gal to Banker's at all. He's goin' ter take her some'rs an' shet her up or I'm a catfish. Never mind; he'll come back again an' I've got the kerridge down. So fur so good. Ef I ain't dumb as a duck thar's goin' ter be further developments. Thet 'ere am the true Miss Banker comin' home to see her sick pa. Then thar's Madge, from Pine street. She's comin' heer too. Mebbe she's goin' to see a sick pa in t'other 'un's place. By jimcracks, I b'lieve I've hit the nail on the ap'x!"

Eagerly and yet cautiously he watched Fallon and Miss Banker enter the carriage and leave the ferry-house.

He also took the driver's phiz on his memory. He was a hard-looking customer and the boy remembered of having seen him at a South street concert dive crazy drunk.

When he saw the second carriage let Madge La Verd out at the ferry-house and noted her

marvelous resemblance to the lady Jack Fallon had taken away, and that the drivers were not the same, it was all he could do to repress an exclamation of surprise.

"Jes' so, by jinks!" he muttered. "I tumble to the hull racket. Thet's old Banker—I know him, 'cause he us er indulge in ten-cent shines—he's rich, likely to kerflumix, made his last will, an' left all ter his darter. This Fallon aire up ter snuff, an' aire goin' ter run the real heiress off inter some prison, while in steps No. 2, weeps tearlets over the old man and coltars his shakels. Byme-by she and Fallon hitches up, he takes the reins, scoops in the stakes; then folows a 'fat' for the evening newspapers regardin' a susacide in big -life a forty-kerridge funeral, and so forth and so forth—to be continued in our next. Phew! what a fly young nubbin' you aire, Samuel! You'd make a long-headed President w' better togs an' more grasshopper chowder."

And the boy dug his head vigorously, as if to imbed his conclusions where they would grow into a harvest of knowledge.

"This is the racket Danyel were arter then. He's a sly slugger, an' while I kin beat the pumps off him on ther unrave'in' uv ther ball o' yarn, et takes him an' Kelley to put in ther focustary executin' licks."

He paid his passage into the ferry-house and took occasion to pass Madge, and dropped into a seat a couple of yards away.

He did not look at her, but whistled "Over the Garden Wall" in the most approved fashion; nevertheless, he was conscious that she gave him a keen scrutiny, as if she were suspicious that he was not what he seemed.

In order to allay this suspicion he set about procuring a job of blacking boots.

While he was thus engaged, but a few paces from where she was seated, Ernest Floyd entered the ferry house and approached her.

She instantly arose and put out her hand, with a pretty smile.

"Cousin Ernest, is it really you? I have been waiting ever so long," she said.

"Oh, what a whopper. She'd be boss on a fish story," inwardly commented Sam.

"You must really excuse me," Floyd replied, shaking hands with her. "I did not get away from the warehouse until late."

"No excuses, please. I most want to hear of papa," and tears sprung into her eyes, while she stifled a sob behind her handkerchief.

"Crockerdial tears!" Sam mused, feeling like slinging his blacking box at her.

"Do not weep, Miss Banker. If it is for the best, and we have no reason to believe that death is for any other cause, we should try and be resigned. Your father has been very low during the day, but I have every confidence that morning will see him a great deal better."

"Oh! how cheering are your words! You cannot understand how sad I have been. Let us go, at once."

"We will have to cross by the ferry, in order to expedite matters. The course of the strong wind is such as would hardly admit of us touching at Kensington, in two hours or more, so I sent the Sylph back by the sailing-master, and we will cross by the ferry."

"Anything to make time, sir. I should grieve myself to death, if I were too late to see poor papa alive!"

And here she burst into a violent fit of weeping, behind her handkerchief.

"Be calm, I pray you, Miss Banker," Floyd pleaded. "I can well understand your feelings, but it will not do to give way entirely, for while there's life, there is hope. If the great Maker sees fit to take away uncle, I am sure he will leave behind the life record of a noble man. Of course you would miss him, but others have passed through similar afflictions bravely and with resignation, and you should try to do the same. The deepest sympathy is expressed for you, on every hand, and with unlimited wealth and true friends, you cannot be as badly situated as many a poor girl. I, too have endured a great sorrow, but I have tried by strict application to business, to heal the wound."

"I think I can understand your sorrow," she replied, quietly.

"Then, in my delirium, I did betray to those around me things of the past which in my rational senses I would not have done."

"To me only. I nursed you through all and learned enough to comprehend all that you had passed through, and how you had been deceived—by whom I know no more than you. I locked your secret within my own breast, and, during your illness, having formed a liking for you that it would have been unwise to allow to grow into a stronger passion, as soon as I saw

that your recovery was assured, packed myself off to school again, although my education had already been completed, so far as schools were concerned. Excuse me for this revelation, but I make it now, as I may never have as suitable an opportunity, and it is better we should understand our relative positions in life from the first, is it not?" and she smiled sweetly.

Ernest Floyd nodded, hardly knowing that he did so, for in truth he was thoroughly non-plused.

Did she mean by her words to insinuate that her station in life now was superior to his own, and that it was her wish that he should consider it so and keep himself accordingly aloof?

So it appeared to him, and a little chill of disappointment seized upon him; with his bitter experience with the false Belle Banker constantly rising before his mind it was but natural that he should expect something a little better and different from this reality.

This was the genuine Belle Banker.

Nothing could have convinced him to the contrary, for did she not know of his illness and of what he had revealed while in his delirious state?

He saw that she was not inclined to talk further on the topic, and so he changed the subject, and the ferry-boat soon arrived.

They went on board, but Sewer Sam did not. He had no further desire to overhear their conversation, or as he remarked to himself after the ferry had gone:

"Thar: I've got it all down pat, an' my small noggin' 'sire full enuff to bust, I'm blamed ef it ain't. Ef I don't find Danyel or John P. afore long it's like as not I'd be tuk down wi' the brain fever. Can't unload the' till his nibs, Jack Fallon, gits back. 'Spect I'd enjoy breakfast by that time.

In this surmise, however, he was not correct, for the cab returned to the ferry, and let Fallon out, after which it drove away to the stables.

The whole time it was gone, was two hours, and Sam calculated that not over fifteen miles out in the country, was Miss Banker to be found, either dead or alive.

The first boat over was boarded by the prince of schemers, while his shadow took advantage of the same means of reaching Philadelphia.

From the landing, Jack Fallon went direct to the corner of Nineteenth and Spruce, where he had agreed to meet Kitty.

As every Philadelphian probably knows, this neighborhood, though somewhat aristocratic, is not the lightest and most pleasant of a dark night, and at an early hour, comparatively few people are here seen abroad.

To night the darkness was almost intense, the street lamps seeming to emit but mere specks of light.

If Fallon meant evil he could scarcely have found a better spot, anywhere in the heart of the city, to accomplish his purpose.

And the desperate light in his eyes would have seemed to indicate that he did not mean any good toward the girl he had promised to marry.

She was there, waiting for him, apparently with great impatience.

"Did you think I wasn't coming?" he asked, pleasantly.

"I hardly looked for you, and was just making up my mind to go and expose you."

"Lucky thing I came, then. How is the old man?"

"He touched none of the food I sent him, and has had three spells of vomiting, which the doctors seem surprised at, and all agree that it has helped him."

"Ten thousand devils! Something is wrong. Curse you, you have let the cat out of the bag!"

"No! no! I have not. Do you suppose I would dare do that?"

"Like the tigress you are, yes."

"You lie! No one was ever truer to you than I—no other woman would have mortgaged her soul to bell, as I have done for you! Do not deny it. I have risked all for you, and if anything is suspected or wrong, up at the house, you can thank Ernest Floyd for it. I've played for you, and now you must pay the fiddler. You must marry me!"

"Oh! I must, eh?"

"You must."

"Well, I rather fancy not. I calculate I've used you about to the extent of your usefulness, and as my intended wife will henceforth sojourn at the Banker mansion, I'll—"

He did not finish, but with a sudden movement, drew his right hand from behind him, and struck her a fearful blow upon the head with a black jack.

She fell to the pavement like a log, wholly insensible and helpless.

He had evidently timed his act well, for in neither direction could he see a sign of human presence.

Quickly raising her in his arms, he bore her to the culvert, at the corner, and lifting the man trap, crammed her through the aperture, and she went down, down, down!

"There! thus is quieted one danger, forever, and no trace of the crime left behind. The blow must have crushed in her skull, and were such a thing possible that she were ever again to reach this upper world, it would be as an idiot or a maniac."

He closed the man-trap, then, and hurried away, an occasional grim chuckle breaking from his lips.

The next morning, after a breakfast that caused his stomach to swell out like that of a second-term magistrate, Sewer Sam presented himself at the "office," and although he had not forgotten his victuals, it must be confessed that he had wholly forgotten the condition of his face, head and hands.

He found Dan Hickey at the office, his face clouded with anxiety.

"Hillo, Danyel!" the youth saluted, as he took a seat and elevated his heels upon the table; "what yer lookin' so grum about? Hain't hed yer b'iler filled yet, eh?"

"Yes, long ago."

"So did I. Stopped into Green's gallus cafe, on Chestnut street, an' eat an' eat till tuer waiter he said I'd hev ter adjourn till ther next refrigerator train cum frum Shercawgo. I then finished up on shrimp sirloin, a la mud, wi' cranberry sass, cut bias, an' ther fricaseed expression of a car-hoss's laugh! Oh! but it were scrumptious! The coon he axed if I'd her high wine, an' arter I axed how high they was, I concluded it war useless ter hev any conversation wi' him, an' so we parted, arter I collared a silk handkerchief outhen his anterior pocket."

"Will that tongue of yours never cease to wag, boy?"

"Not as long as it aire attached to a wagon, boss. But, ter biz. Where's Kel?"

"That's what I am worrying about. He left me yesterday, to visit No. — Pine street, and has not showed up, since!"

"That settles it! They've scooped him in. Thet am the place whar his hangle s, Jack Fallon, hangs out—leashow, I run him in an' out of thar, yesterday."

"The dauce you did! Like enough John has got into a tr p, then; if so it will be the first time since he has been in the biz."

"Ther best men gits knocked out, now an' then," Sam observed. "Ef Kelley's in thar, they ain't goin' ter hurt him, bet on it. He's too prominent a character. They'll hold him, till they're through their game."

"Not if I am any judge. I'll get him out of there in a jiffy."

"If you do, I'll resign!"

"Why; what the dickens ails you?"

"You let Kel alone, fer a few hours. If an attempt is made ter get him out, they'll be on to us, pat, and be as pert and coy as bald-headed oysters; t'other way, they won't tumble that we aire nosin' 'em, an' when ther trap is ready to spring, we'll gobble up ther hull stock, Jay Gould style."

"A sensible idea, boy, and it shall be as you say."

"You bet I'm level-headed, especially arter a level meal."

"Well, give us your report. What have you learned?"

"Ther hull thing; got it down pat as a por'us plaster. Jest favor Sam'l wi' one o' yer Flor de Fumigators, an' he will unfold to you a tale thet would make a mid-summer's night Thomaso Cat howl in righteous indignation," and after lighting the cigar, the gamin proceed to give Hickey a minute exclamation of all that he had learned, up to the time of his return by Gloucester ferry to Philadelphia.

CHAPTER VI.

POISONING.

It was a rather late hour before Ernest Floyd and his fair charge reached the Banker mansion, which was located upon one of the aristocratic avenues of that northeastern portion of the city known as Kensington.

Floyd rung the bell, and they were admitted by an old negro-servant, who bowed low to the false daughter, she merely making acknowledgment by a cold nod, all of which appeared to surprise Sambo; for the beautiful child wo-

man, who had known him since babyhood, had always treated him kindly, and as a member of the family.

"Sambo, please show Miss Banker up to the sick-room," Ernest ordered. "I will await your return in the parlor."

"Will you not accompany me, cousin?" Madge asked, turning to him.

"No, pray excuse me, Miss Banker. I will come up after I speak with Sambo, on his return. Be brave now, and do not break down, as it will only make uncle feel worse, as he is very sensitive."

"I will try to be calm, sir. Come, Sambo."

"Yes, Missy Belle."

And the two ascended the velvety stairs, while young Floyd entered the luxurious waiting parlor, and threw himself upon a sofa.

"Heigho! what a world!" he sighed. "A world of air-castles, built only to be shattered. How different this girl from the one who hovered over me in my delirium, and yet how alike is she to the fascinating fiend who worked me into her net! There is something strange in all this—something which I cannot understand. I wish I could again see that man Hickey. I trust much in his sagacity. I believe there is a foul plot on foot, and that there is a traitor in this household, who is worked by others—Jack Fallon, for instance. This girl—Bak! There can be no doubt but what she is Belle Banker; yet I would fain not believe it. I had pictured a different girl, but two years often work a miraculous change in a woman. It will be for uncle's keen eyes to pick out any flaws."

Sambo soon came back, and entered the parlor, with a respectful bow.

"Well, Marse Floyd?"

"Ah! come and sit down, Sambo. I want to speak to you."

"Scuse me, Marse Floyd—not 'lowed to sit in de parlor, sah."

"Come and sit down. I'll be responsible for all the harm done."

The old servitor hesitatingly obeyed, evidently distrustful of the consequences.

"Now, Sambo, how are matters? What change has there been since I left?"

"None for de wuss, sah. I'se 'deed an' glad to say, sah. De doctors hab all gone away, sayin' dar's no trouble to be feared fo' mornin' sah."

"That is good. The vomiting seemed to relieve him?"

"Yes, sah."

"Then Hickey was right. Who is with uncle, besides cousin, Sambo?"

"Butler, sah."

"What's your opinion of Butler, Sambo?"

"Dunno, sah—dunno nuffin' 'bout him."

"Have you ever seen any conversation take place between him and Kitty?"

"Yes, sah. They freskently hab a chat at de table, an' he chucks her under de chin, an' dey're orful ca'ful not to let de ole nigger heah w'ot dey say."

"Here's a revelation," Ernest mused. "This pious-faced attendant may not be quite what he seems, after all."

Aloud, he continued:

"Where is Kitty, Sambo?"

"She went out fo' de ebenin', sah."

"That's nice, with sickness in the house. Now, what do you think of Belle, Sambo?"

"'Deed, Marse Floyd, dis nigger don' know how to answer dat. Bress you, she hain't changed a bit, 'cept she acts mighty stuck-up an' big-feelin', like. When de missy useter cum lum, she allus trowed her arms reun' dis ole nig's neck, an' gib me a hug w'ot made me think fo' all de world dat Chloe had come back on earf ag'in. But, 'deed an' God knows, dar's a heap lot ob change takin' place in de folks, now-adays."

"True enough. You lock up the house, Sambo, and come up to uncle's room."

And rising, he went up stairs.

Entering the sick-room rather suddenly, he saw Madge and Butler standing at the foot of the bed engaged in a low conversation, which they dropped as he entered.

Mr. Banker lay in bed, partly bolstered up on pillows.

He was a large-framed man of five and forty years, and his heavily bearded face had a noble look, even though pale and emaciated from suffering.

He had been watching Madge and Butler, with a rather peculiar expression, which did not wholly vanish, though his face brightened up when Ernest entered.

"Well, uncle, I hear you are feeling better," the young man said, seating himself by the bedside.

"Yes, my boy. Thanks to that emetic you gave me, I feel great relief."

"Have you taken any more?"

"No."

"I thought I gave orders to give another dose, in an hour," Ernest said, turning angrily to Butler. "Why did you not do as directed?"

"Because, sir, I didn't deem it necessary."

"Indeed! You evidently prefer to suit your own convenience about administering remedies. Is that it?"

"I believe I have charge of this sick-room, sir, as nurse, and in such capacity I am going out of the line of my business to give the patient anything but what the qualified physicians order!" Butler responded, stiffly.

Ernest flushed hotly.

"Very well," he said. "Since you are scrupulous about administering an emetic that has already done your employer good, I will relieve you of the night watch, and you can seek a much needed rest."

"You will excuse me, young man, but you are entirely too officious, for the position you occupy. I receive my orders from Mr. Banker and his daughter, and shall retain my vigil as long as it may please them."

Ernest felt like springing at the man's throat, but he desisted, and turned to Mr. Banker.

"Uncle, I would prefer to see you through to-night, feeling positive you will be all the better for it on the morrow. Is my wish to be respected?"

"Certainly. Butler, you are excused until morning."

Bowing stiffly, the man took his hat and left the room, without a word.

"If you remain, cousin, I will also, to keep you company," Madge said, seating herself near the bed.

"As you like," Ernest replied, coldly.

He then gave the patient another emetic, which produced vomiting, almost instantly, the discharge being of a greenish color.

A grim glitter entered Ernest's eyes.

"Miss Banker, I perceive that the towels are all gone," he said. "Will you be kind enough to go down and tell Sambo to get you half-a-dozen from the laundry?"

"Cannot I ring for him, as well?"

"I believe the call-bell is out of order, ma'am."

Madge, evidently doubted this, but as there was no other excuse for her, except refusal, she felt in duty bound to leave the room, against her will.

The moment she was gone, Ernest Floyd bent forward, and looked his uncle in the face.

"Uncle, do you know what has taken you so near to death's door?" he asked.

"My boy, I do not, I only know that I am very near my end."

"Possibly. It may be too late to save you but I am sanguine that it is not. I will tell you what ails you—you have been dying by inches by poison!"

Joshua Banker gave a startled gasp.

"My God! what do you mean?" he asked.

"Exactly what I said. I was warned by a detective, who knows more than I do. He gave me the emetic and ordered me to test myself. I have done so, and you have been relieved."

"Merciful Heaven! Ernest, boy, who is the author of this?"

"That is not for me to say. This detective, Hickey, is working up the case, of which you are the victim. An accident put him in possession of facts, that interested him in your behalf."

"This is so sudden that it seems hard to believe it. Yet, I feel you are right, and may God bless you for it. I trust all to you, boy. Henceforth, your will is law. Act as your judgment best directs."

"Thank you for the power that enables me to do my best by you. To-morrow, I will dismiss the council of doctors, and get Doctor Fitch of West Philadelphia, and a nurse who can be trusted."

"Then you do not trust Butler?"

"I do not; neither do I your servant Kitty. But, let's talk no more, until a better opportunity. I shall see to it, personally, that you are rightly cared for. Ah! your daughter is coming up stairs."

"What do you think of her?"

"She is a most magnificent-looking young lady. Further, I do not know of her."

"True. Somehow she has lost many of her old ways."

Ah!

He had noticed a difference, too!

Floyd could not help wondering at it.

Madge entered, just then, with the towels.

"The house looks so natural," she said. "I think I will take a look around it, to see if Kitty has everything put to rights."

And, after kissing the sick man upon the forehead, she left the room.

"Send Sambo up," Ernest said, as she departed; and the aged servitor directly entered.

Madge did not go over the house.

She went to the kitchen, where Butler was seated, with a grim face.

"Well?" he interrogated.

"I fear the jig's up. Floyd suspects the truth, and I fancy that while I was down-stairs after the towels, he posted the gov'nor."

"Curse him! He's too sharp. I wish the captain would come."

A rap came at the rear door.

Madge opened it, and Jack Fallon entered.

"Hello! what's up?" he demanded at sight of Butler.

"A new nurse, up-stairs."

"Who?"

"Floyd."

"The deuce! What has happened?"

"Oh! he gave the gov'nor an emetic, and he threw up, and feels better."

"Furies! Does he smell the rat?"

"There can be no doubt of it."

"Then, there's but one remedy. He must take a trip to Davy Jones's locker."

"Never!" Madge hissed. "Even I know better than that. It is not impossible that he has told the patient, in which case his disappearance would be the end of our chances. Where is that charming counterpart of mine?"

"Safe in a deserted cabin, in a Jersey wilderness."

"Are you positive?"

"Of course."

"Well, that is good, so far. But something has got to be done, *here*. The old gent will likely get on his feet again, under Floyd's care. He is a hawk, and I fancy he has allies and that we are in greater peril than we think."

"Bah! you are too ready to borrow trouble," Fallon growled. "Let the fellow have his own way, in everything. Our victim will not escape us. I know of a cunning old French chemist who furnishes an odorless, invisible powder, which when dusted on the pillow does the job for an advanced patient, in two days. It will fix the governor like a charm. I will send it in the morning. You are not to remain in the room longer than an hour at a time, and it will not harm you."

"Very good. There's another thing, before I forget it," Madge said. "I fancy the gov'nor will propose a marriage between Floyd and me. What then?"

"Marry him of course! It won't take long to get rid of him, afterward."

"As you will. I am your pupil," Madge laughed. "I must be going, now, lest my absence attract attention!"

"I, too, must be going. I'll send the powder in the morning, and see you when it is safe."

Dan Hickey, detective, listened intently to Sewer Sam's narration.

"I believe you have indeed started the unraveling of the ball," he said, when the gamine had finished. "The first was the real Belle Banker, and she has been conveyed off and put out of the way. The second is the false, and aims to get Joshua Banker's money."

"Ye kin bet them statistics air bang up," asseverated Sam. "I know'd ye'd agree wi' me. Now, what's ter be did? Where's our Alabama claim comin' in, in his case?"

"I'll see young Floyd to-day, and form my plans. If the old man dies or not, I fancy the fellow, Floyd, won't let us go unpaid, for he's square."

"Matbel!"

"I am positive of it. I want to fixure the case so as to spring the trap all at once, and make an overwhelming victory over the ones who are working the racket. I also want to close in on that Pine-street place, and find what it is."

"Well, have ye got any orders for me?"

"No. You can run out to Lemon Hill, in Fairmount Park, and see if you can spot any of the car burglars, whose case we have on the books. I will jog around town, and arrange my campaign plans. Drop in again toward night."

"All right. During the day I'll kill two birds with one skillet. Ther's a pertic'ler purty piece o' caliker down South street, what dotes on my beauty, an' I'll go courther up wi' a quart o' Italyun peanuts, an' at the same time keep an eye out for the jawhawk who driv' thet kerridge."

"A good idea. Here's a saw-buck, boy. If you see him, you may want to work him."

"You bet!" Sam smiled, freezing onto the crisp note. "I'm j-ast ther boy ter do thet. If I meet him, I'll swell his head till he can't see his own nose. Whoop-ee! won't I have one squar' meal tho'? No more stewed shrimps or owl's eyebrows *a la mud* fer me! I want yer ter distinctly understand that I henceforemost eat nothing but roast webison and *po'u*!"

And putting his thumbs to his arm-pits, he strutted from the office.

Like many boys of tender age, nowadays, Sam was not lacking of "his girl."

Miss Katie Myrtle was the daughter and only child of a poor, respectable family, that dwelt in one of the houses of one of the dingy courts off of South street, and it was only by the united efforts of father, mother and daughter that they got along.

Sam had become acquainted with Katie on the streets, and got "stuck" on her pretty face; and his own shrewd ways and prospects were rather to the liking of her parents, who gradually grew to regard Sam as an indispensable adjunct to the household, as there were never any "blues" when he was around; so from the office he made his way to the Myrtle "mansion," where he found all the family at home.

"Shure it's sorry's the luck we're havin', me boy," Mrs. Myrtle said. "Pat's in bed, there, with a crushed foot; Katie got discharged till coold weather, an' 'twixt 'tendin' Pat and an occasional wash I have to do, it's a moighty hard toime we have to get along."

"That aire bad," Sam declared. "Don't worry, tho'. I've a wee bit laid away in the bank, ef I am a kid, you bet, an' you sha'n't want fer wittles as long as I'm around."

"Ah! me lad, you're too liberal," Pat Myrtle exclaimed. "Yez have the heart of a saint, but we can take no more off yez, for yez have already done too much for us. I expect to get about in a week again."

"Yes, papa; and then there's the Pine-street lady, who said she would give me ten dollars a week if I would come and do her housework and keep me mouth shut."

"Divil a bit yez go there, Katie! It can be no decent place as w'd be so particular an' pay the loikes av them wages!" Mrs. Myrtle cried, waxing hot.

"Yis, I'll break ivery bone in her—corset, if she dares think av it!" chimed in Pat.

"What's the number of this place?" Sam asked, pricking up his ears. "I may be able ter give yer a pointer or two about it."

"Shure the name was Mrs. La Verd, an' the place No. — Pine street, me boy."

"Kerwhoop! The very place, or I'm a cross-eyed clam."

"What place, boy?"

"A 'crook,' yer know—a place where some kind o' willainv goes on w'ot nobody knows on; fer instince, like harborin' stolen articles, or counterfeitin', or subbin' o' the kind. We've bin spottin' the place, but lacked evidence eruff ter warrant a raid, tho' we're pretty positive our man Kelley is locked up there now. Jest you let Katie go there to work, an' if she don't stay no more'n a couple o' days, we, the firm o' Kelley, Hickey & Co., will see that she gets a six months' wages out of it!"

"Then I'll go," Katie declared.

But she didn't.

CHAPTER VII.

HICKEY DOES SOME SLUGGING.

DAN HICKEY, soon after the departure of Sewer Sam, closed up his office and betook himself to Mile Cleary's boxing-resort on Vine street, but as there was nothing going on there, he next visited Arthur Chambers's place on Ridge avenue, and found the little Englishman "hat 'ome," as he expressed it.

The spacious barroom, as ever, was filled with men of pugilistic proclivities, and, being a boxer himself, Hickey was known to the majority, and many glances were leveled at his handsome figure.

It was well known that there were few of the *habitués* of Chambers's Champion's Rest who could knock the dashing detective out; hence, those who had previously been punished for their temerity in attacking him, were ever on the *qui vive* to find some one who could make a clean sweep of him.

One of his most earnest enemies was an ugly-mugged bruiser named Pete Grogan, who was never without a half-pint of whisky in him, and inclined to be insulting.

On several occasions Hickey had been tempted to give him a thrashing that he would not soon

forget; but his respect for the perfect order Chambers's place maintained had caused him to desist from such a purpose.

Grogan had no money to speak of, but had liberal backing, and was somewhat noted for getting up fights between amateur would-be pugilists.

He had been drinking freely that morning, and spied Hickey almost immediately; so he strutted up to the detective in his usual blustering way and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Hello, Mr. Slugger! Come down to get an eye put in mournin', have yez?" he saluted with a sort of leer.

"Not that I am aware of," Hickey replied, coolly.

"Oh! then you think thar ain't no one 'cept a Sullivan that kin do it, hey?"

"Plenty, no doubt, although I don't remember that any one ever accomplished the feat."

"Brag! Why, you're a reg'lar bunch of bombast. I'm the lad, from County Clare, bedad, that kin knock yez out!"

"Oh! you can?" and Hickey smiled. "What have you got that says so, Mr. Grogan?"

"Fifty dollars, begorra, wi' hard gloves."

"No 'ard glove contests bin my 'ouse, you know," Arthur Chambers interposed. "Hif you gents want to scrap it must be with soft gloves."

"Certainly," Hickey agreed. "This fellow has been dinging at me a long time, and so I might as well knock him into a corner and settle it."

"Arrah, me boy, an' if yez do, I've a friend w'ot kin sind ye into the middle av next week, bedad. This way, Jamie McGilligan."

Two men pushed forward.

One of them, the man McGilligan, was a burly, low-browed customer, with a prize-fighter's head and face, and a muscular paw; the other was Jack Fallon, dressed in the height of fashion.

Hickey was surprised, but did not betray it, and made no indication that he had ever met the genteel rogue before.

"Mr. McGilligan, this is the party, Hickey, that I was after sp'akin' of. I'll thry a bout; thin, if there's anything left of him, yez can give him a tussle."

"Would yez be kind enough to let me spoil the mug av ye, Mr. Hickey?" McGilligan asked.

"To be sure I would like to do it."

"You shall have the privilege, sir," Dan replied.

The money was then posted in Chambers's hand, and the party adjourned to the spacious boxing-room, Lew Clarke, better known as "Shorty," being chosen as referee.

At the word the two antagonists took their places and began to spar lightly, in order to feel each other's weakest points; then, unexpectedly to every one, Hickey's arm shot out with marvelous celerity, and Grogan received a blow fair between the eyes that laid him on his back.

Indeed it would have felled a bullock.

Grogan lay like one paralyzed, and when "time" was called he struggled to his feet and staggered out of the ring.

"Enough!" he growled.

"Hurrah!" yelled Shorty Clarke. "Out on the first. I kin do as well as that myself."

"Where is the next gentleman that wants to get accommodated?" Dan asked, with a peculiar smile. "I haven't had any exercise of this kind for a week."

McGilligan hesitated, and looked rather doubtful, but Jack Fallon gave him a nudge.

"Go ahead," he whispered. "You can earn a pile by breaking his skull. I'll back you."

McGilligan was known by many as "The Terror of the Fourth Ward," being a ruffian of the first-water, and bearing a hard reputation in general.

Hickey knew this, and felt satisfied that Jack Fallon was purposely urging him on, in hopes that he, Hickey, might be disabled to such an extent as to render it impossible for him to do detective duty again for some time.

"Well, my man, do you want to spoil my mug, now?" Dan asked, seeing that McGilligan hesitated.

"Beggorra, I do!" the ruffian cried, flinging off his coat, and entering the ring. "If I don't knock the consate out of yez in four rounds, thin me name is not Jamie McGilligan."

"Then you can bet your name isn't Jamie!" Dan laughed. "At least you'll think so when I get through with you."

"I'll bet a hundred you don't knock him out!" Jack Fallon exclaimed.

"Taken! Mr. Chambers holds a hundred of mine. Put up, or hush."

"Maybe I hush up for every loafer that invites me to do so!" Fallon sneered.

"You said loafer?"

"You are not deaf?"

"Very well. I'll see you later. Now, then, Mr. McGilligan!"

The two men came to time, and for five minutes did some clever boxing, the slugging being terrific, but neither man hardly leaving his tracks.

Suddenly, however, Hickey caught his opponent under the jaw, with a left-hander, and with such terrific force as to land the victim into an adjacent corner, in a promiscuous heap.

He quickly arose, and came to time, only to be almost instantly knocked upon his back; four times he did it, with the same result, but the fifth time the rough went down he did not arise.

Fallon was by this time fairly infuriated with rage, and rushed into the ring and shook his fist under Hickey's nose.

"Curse you. I'll have your life for this!" he hissed. "So look out for yourself."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the bared iron-like fist of the detective, who was now thoroughly enraged, caught him square in the mouth, and felled him to the floor.

With a howl of rage the villain arose, spitting out a mouthful of teeth and blood, and whipped forth a revolver from his hip-pocket, but with lightning quickness Arthur Chambers dashed the weapon from his grasp, while, seizing him and throwing him over his shoulder, Hickey bore him to the stair-way, and hurled him down.

More dead than alive Jack Fallon reached the first landing, but he managed to get upon his feet again.

"Go!" the pugilist detective cried, sternly. "If I ever see you or hear of you again in Philadelphia, off to Moyamensing you go, as sure as my name is Dan Hickey."

Fallon did not reply, but with the glare of an infuriated wild beast in his eyes, he shook his fist at the author of his sadly battered up appearance, and went on down stairs.

As McGilligan declared that he was satisfied, Dan treated the house, received their congratulations at his victory, and left the Champion's Rest.

He did not go far, however. He felt positive that Grogan and McGilligan belonged to the same set of scoundrels that Fallon did, and that they would meet soon afterward.

He was not mistaken.

In the course of half an hour they left the Champion's Rest, and proceeded further on up the avenue, to a certain summer garden, where beer is served in box-stalls, and a German band discourses Rhineland melody, the year around.

Hickey shadowed them there, and locating the stall they occupied he turned away.

In ten minutes a gray-bearded, stoop-shouldered, poorly-dressed old codger entered the garden, occupied the stall adjoining that taken by the bruisers, and after ordering a pot of ale, and lighting a pipe, settled back to enjoy himself.

Hearing some one arise in the next stall, he quickly drew a dirty pouch from his pocket, and began fumbling over some pennies.

Jack Fallon passed the door an instant later and looked in.

Presently he returned to the adjoining stall.

"It's only some old beggar, counting his pennies to see how much beer he can stand," he said with a grin. "We are entirely safe here. Down with your liquor."

"That Hickey is a knocker," Grogan observed growlingly. "One belt was plenty for meself."

"Curse him. He knocked five of my front teeth out; luckily, however, they were false. He is dangerous and must be disposed of. I have his partner, John Kelley, safely caged. I have ordered a meeting of the Satan's Social for to-night, and we can soon arrange to put this Hickey in limbo."

"What's new to-night?"

"A great deal. There's a settlement to be made, for one thing."

"An' what for?"

"For the simple reason that we may have to suddenly break up for a time, until we can quietly locate a new place. The den on Pine street is already under detective surveillance, I believe, and may be raided at any time. To-night every stockholder will receive all that is due him, and all 'crooks' notified to keep away. Another thing, a change of disguise will be used to-night. Each member will receive at his residence to-day a new uniform, with passwords, and so forth. The meeting will be at the den to-night. Entrance by way of the back alley. Disguises on when you give the raps on the door."

"Correct! But, where'll I get me disguise at? I'm stoppin' at no particular place," Grogan said.

"I'll send it to the Bingham House. All you'll have to do is call and get it."

"At what time?"

"About six."

"All right. Anything else? I've got to go to Haddington to a funeral."

"Nothing else, I guess. When the Social meets full explanations of future business will be given."

"Well, let's shmile, an' thin I'm off."

They took a couple of drinks and then left the garden.

The old codger was fast asleep, apparently, when they left their stall, and though they awaited a time outside, he did not appear, and they went off, satisfied that he was a *bona fide* tramp.

Ernest Floyd and Sambo remained with Mr. Banker all night, Madge retiring to her room shortly after midnight.

The patient slept well, and awoke at sunrise, looking decidedly refreshed, to find only Madge in the room.

"Where is Ernest, Belle?" he asked.

"Ah! papa, awake? How much better you look! Did you ask about Ernest? He is down at breakfast. Did you want him?"

"Tell him he needn't go to the warehouse for a couple of days. Austin is competent to take charge. A couple of days I think, will suffice to end my earthly career, and I want you both with me."

"Oh, papa, do not give up, but take courage and try to live, for my sake. What would I ever do without you?"

"You will be provided for, Belle, for I am not a poor man."

"I know, papa; but money could never fill the gap your loss would make in our home."

"Maybe not. But I intend to see you provided with a wealthy husband before I die—one whom, though you wed him in haste, you will learn to love the more you know of him."

"But, papa—"

"Hush, child! I know best. Ernest Floyd is one of Nature's noblemen, and it is my desire to see you man and wife."

"But I—I—"

Ernest entered at this moment and greeted the sick man warmly.

"I am glad to see you look so much improved, uncle. You surely must be feeling considerably better."

"In some respects, my boy—in others I am sinking. Two or three days at the furthest, will use me up, I am sure. And, boy, now that we are together, I want you to promise me something. Will you do it?"

"That is something I would not like to do, uncle, until I know what it is you wish me to promise."

"It is this, my boy: I want you to promise to marry my daughter Belle, and thus keep the money in the family."

Ernest turned deathly pale, and fairly staggered.

"I am sorry, uncle, but I cannot promise you."

"Why not, pray?"

"For reasons sacred to myself. Then, too, I do not love your daughter, and could never bring myself to be unmanly enough to wed a woman I did not love—she, too, nearly a stranger to me. Furthermore, I have not, now, nor ever had, any aspirations to become your heir. What I have in this world I desire to earn by the toil of my own hands."

"You are foolish. My daughter wishes to please me, and to do so, stands ready to marry you. All that remains for you to do, is to consent, and the union can be solemnized before I pass away."

"I am sorry, sir—very sorry, but I could not think of such a thing!"

And the young man paced up and down the room, his face the scene of many contending emotions.

"But listen!" the sick man persisted. "In a will, which I made, a few days ago, I made you my sole heir, with exception of a sum of twenty thousand dollars to go to Belle, on the day of her marriage to you. Now, I do not want to have to go to work and make another will, as this plan has been arranged in my mind, for a year past. You, too, I am sure, have bright prospects before you, and I see no reason why you could not be happy together."

"Nor I!" Madge chimed in.

Ernest gave her a withering glance, that caused a flush to spring to her cheek.

"Then, you would be content to marry me, knowing what little you do about me?" he asked, meaningly.

"Believing you to be an honorable gentleman, I would, as much for father's sake as for my own."

"Think it over, boy. Do not be rash in your decision, lest you repent of it afterward," Joshua Banker said.

"I will go to the office," Ernest announced. "I've a large order to fill, this morning. During the day, I will give the matter what consideration it deserves."

And bowing, he took his hat and departed.

He repaired to the office, but after putting matters into Austin's charge, he went downtown.

He had no correct idea of where he was going; he wanted to get out of doors; the air inside stifled him; his brain was literally in a whirl, and he wanted time to reflect.

He wandered aimlessly about town, all the forenoon.

If he could only see Hickey!

But, Hickey was not to be seen.

He procured his dinner, and rambled on. In the course of his stroll, he entered a South street saloon, where two men were cursing each other—tough looking customers they were, and Floyd had been there but a few minutes, when they fell to fighting, furiously, and rolled to the floor in a bear-like hug!

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD JIM BANKER.

ERNEST FLOYD had never been in a fight in his life, and was far from being an advocate of settling disputes in that manner.

And as soon as he saw that the elder of the two contestants was getting decidedly the worst of it, he stepped forward.

"Stop!" he said, sternly. "No more of this, or off to the station-house you go, both of you."

"Looker heer, what you lippin' inter the fuss for?" cried the man who had been on top. "I've a mind to mash you!"

"On! I guess not!" Ernest retorted, betraying a detective's badge, by raising the collar of his vest. "If you don't want Judge Ludlow to get hold of you, be off, and behave yourself."

The fellow uttered an ugly growl, and obeyed. He evidently had no desire to get into the hands of the law.

The badge was one young Floyd had found in the street, a few days before, and was thus, at his service as a peacemaker.

Seeing no probability of a further row, he left the saloon—the man whom he had saved from pummeling, following him.

"Looker heer, young man," he said, tapping Ernest on the shoulder. "I reckon I have seen you, somewheres."

"Very likely: I'm seen on the street by as many as a half dozen people, every day," Ernest replied, dryly. "Here's a dime, old man; good-day!"

But the "old man" shoved it back.

"Hold yer hosses, young man. I ain't no beggar, ef I am a bum. Yer face is familiar, an' don't fergit it. Jest tell me yer name. My memory is a little shaky, but I allow I am a relative."

"Indeed. Why, my name might be Johnson."

"Ye lie, durn ye. Ther warn't a Johnson among the connection. Ah! I have it, now. Ye'r a Floyd—old Peter Floyd's boy. Yer mother, Sarah, was my sister!"

To say that Ernest was surprised, would be stating a very evident fact.

"See here, what you giving me? You're no uncle of mine."

"Ain't I? Well, ef I ain't I'll be soused. Jim Banker's my name, every day in a week. C me inter this 'ere garden, an' let's have a chat."

They entered a beer garden, near by, and became seated, only to be followed by Sewer Sam, who took a seat near at hand.

"Spect mebbe ye never heard of me," the bummer went on. "I were a soaker, from early boyhood, an' the folks they ceased recognizing me. Finally I run away to Calif'ny."

A faint memory of a wild, dissipated uncle, as pictured by his father, came struggling back to Ernest, through a veil of years.

"I think I have heard of you, but it is years since I did, if at all," he confessed.

"Yes, years ago I went to Californy, an' made a fortune in two years, came back to Chicago, got married, an' spent the boodle. As soon as it were gone, my old woman bounced me, an' went back to Californy, an' didn't come back till a few years ago, when I found

her, an' we went to livin' together again. Ther were a grown up daughter, too, an' the two on 'em swindled me out o' my swag, made me what I am, and sent me to an inebriate asylum. I were too cunnin' fer 'em, however, an' got out, an' my day fer revenge ain't far off."

"Well, yours has been a strange experience, indeed, if it is true."

"True as preachin' every word of it, my boy."

A sudden startling thought crossed young Floyd's mind.

"What kind of a looking girl is your daughter, sir?"

The bummer chuckled, broadly.

"Ye orter know, young man, when she an' her scheming mother pulled ye inter their trap, so as to have a grip on old Banker's property at his death!"

"Then, you mean to tell me that it was your daughter, I secretly married?"

"Infer what ye please. Where d'ye work? I've got a few little plans to navigate, my boy, an' I may be of great help. Ye look like an honest fellow."

Ernest gave him a card.

"All right, my boy. I'll see you again. Excuse an old tough like me for speakin' to you. My walk in life is considerable lower than yours."

He arose and staggered away to another part of the garden, and sat down.

Floyd was about to arise and leave the garden, when Sewer Sam glided over and occupied the seat the bummer had just vacated.

"Hold yer goats, boss," the gamin half ordered. "I want interview yer, too."

"You do?"

"Bet a clam chowder on it."

"Humph! I seem to create quite a sensation down here. Who are you, pray?"

"A kingly kid answering to the aristocratic handle of Sewer Sam. I have the honor of forming the Co. part of that particular detective alliance, known as Kelley, Hickey & Co."

"Indeed! Well, Mr. Sam, what can I do for you, pray?"

"Not much, 'cause I just had a dozen, now; but ye see, I kin do a heap fer you. That's whar the worm turned the fables on the crab."

"What can you do for me?"

"Lots! But, let's begin at the first rivet in the wheel. Hickey's been huntin' ye. Hev yer seen him?"

"No. I too, have been looking for him."

"Then, wait here the length of an eyewinker, while I send a messenger after his nibs. If my name ain't mud, that's a heap lot of work to be did, ter-night."

And away darted the lad, like a streak.

In five minutes he was back.

"His giblets will pedestrianize this way at street-car speed," Sam apprised. "Talkin' wi' the old rooster, yer kno', an' I couldn't help listnin' no more than I could refuse a baked apple-dumpling. Chock-full o' curiosity, I am. So you've went an' done it, eh?"

"Done what, sir?"

"Went off an' webbed yerself ter a female spider that were flyer than you were—spiled yerself ter all future time, by gittin' spliced before ther was hairs enuff on yer lip ter make a toothbrush. Better you than me. I got a piece o' kaliker, up street, but she's got it writ down in her 'slam book that that's to be no ministerial dewelopments, 'til I'm at least the president of a bank, or strike a capertal prize in ther Lousvanner Lottery."

"You crazy young reprobate. What are you driving at?"

"You, fer marryin'."

"What's it your business?"

"None; only I allers like ter give good 'hole-some advice. Now, afore Hickey comes, to save time, you might as well throw open your throttle an' let us hear any news you hev got."

"I prefer to give my news to Mr. Hickey."

"Now, that's what I call downright cheek, arter I nosed out all thet's known, an' got my grip on ther t'other thumbscrew over yonder in the corner. Never mind, young feller. You sit right thar an' make his nibs yer confidant. I don't keer a fig, fer I know'd ye was tew young ter fight ther battles o' this life."

And in high dudgeon, Samuel proceeded to occupy another seat, and order beer, cheese and crackers.

Hickey soon made his appearance. He shook hands cordially with young Floyd, and then became seated.

"Well, what's the news? Ah! bello! what's the matter with the boy?" for he now caught sight of Sam, who looked as sullen as a thunder-cloud.

"Oh! he wanted me to unburden to him, and I didn't deem it necessary, so he got huffy."

"You did wrong. The boy is our partner in every respect. Hey, Sam?"

"What d'ye want?"

"Come over here."

"Can't; I'm beer-y busy."

"Come on, you young rascal. No time to lose. Dig the wax out o' yer ears, an' prepare to digest what you hear."

"Ye don't expect that clam ter open out, do ye?" indicating Floyd.

"Cert! Sit down. This is all confidential between us. Now, Mr. Floyd, how did the emetic work?"

"As you calculated. There's poison in the case! Two parties are implicated—Kitty is missing; Butler still remains."

"How is the patient?"

"Looking better, but of the belief that he will not go over two days. I sent for Doctor Fitch, of West Philadelphia."

"None better in such cases, than be. Miss Banker arrived, safely?"

"She did."

"What do you think of her?"

"My opinion of her, as at first, is not very exalted!"

"Any other news?"

"The old servant Sambo says he don't know how to take her."

"And the patient?"

"I fancy he is not quite satisfied with her, although he does not admit it."

"Does he know of the poisoning?"

"I told him."

"Surprised?"

"In the greatest degree."

"Anything else, new?"

"Yes. My uncle made known to me his wish—to the effect that I should wed his daughter."

"Humph! Wants to keep the tin in the family, eh?"

"Exactly."

"What did you say?"

"I refused, at first, but on being pressed, promised to consider."

"A wise move. Keep in with the patient."

"What, and wed the girl?"

"No. I will stop the marriage."

"How?"

"Never mind. I've been looking up the antecedents of this man, Miles Butler."

"In what way are his antecedents connected with clapping such a marriage?"

"Leave that to me. The woman in your uncle's mansion, is not Belle Banker at all."

"What?"

"You heard me, did you not?"

"My God! Then she is my wife, as I have half believed!"

"Don't take any stock in that, even if you are positive of it. I fancy I can prove she has a husband living, who fell into her trap ere you did. Nevertheless, you go on and arrange for the marriage, for day after to-morrow. Go, now; then come back, and join me at our office at No. — Sansom street."

"But, let me understand some part of this. If that woman is not Belle Banker, where under the heavens is the true Belle?"

"Jack Fallon decoyed her into the wilds of Jersey, and shut her up. This rat, Sewer Sam, found out the whole thing."

Floyd put out his hand.

"Shake, my brave boy, and forgive me for the lack of confidence I had in you, on the plea that you were an utter stranger to me."

"Let it pass," Sam drawled. "An oyster stew will bridge the bloody chasm."

"A hundred of them you shall have. And, now, friend Hickey, how do you propose to find the real heiress?"

"I've got hold of that job," Sam remarked.

"See the old codger over thar, Danyel? Well, that's the dad to the gal what his nibs, here, married—jest was 'splainin' it, a bit ago—an' he's the shrimp what driv' the kerridge, the gal went in. He knows whar she is, an' ef I mis'ake not, he goes thar, to-night. See; he's sleepin', ter be ready. His cue is revenge on the gal at Banker's, an' her mother, which I opine may be found on Pine street. All we want's to find where our girl is."

"Exactly."

"Well, his hulks ain't goin' to stay away from her, long, and I ain't goin' ter stay far away from him. When he wisits the gal, I wisits arter him."

"Here, too!" Ernest answered. "I will hurry up to the mansion, announce my decision, and then rejoin you, if you tell me where."

"Well, ef ye go long wi' me, ye must reckon I'm captin'!" Sam observed.

"Certainly! I am now well satisfied that you are capable of leading."

"Well, then come back, an' fine me at the Gloster ferry's pier, but keep out o' sight. I don't cackylate the old gent will get ready to move much afore dark."

After a few more words Floyd hastened away, and Sam and Hickey exchanged views and plans.

"My girl, Katie, goes to work for the Pine-street party, and what you don't learn to-night, I may be able to learn later," the boy said. "Look sharp they don't trap you, or there will be two of the firm in the boat."

"I will be careful. If you are lucky enough to find the girl, fetch her to the office, and leave her there, until we can better arrange for her. I do not want her to go home, until I take her, and spring on those who would rob her of her rights."

"Keroot!"

Then the boot-black shuffled off, and Hickey turned his footsteps toward the heart of the city.

Smarting under the disastrous effects of his treatment at the hands of Dan Hickey, Jack Fallon, after parting with Grogan and McGilligan, made his way to the Banker warehouse, hoping to find Floyd there, and vent some of his malicious spite on him.

Austin, a pleasant-appearing young man, was the only occupant of the office. He commanded an under position, and at one time had aspired to become business manager, but young Floyd had been installed into the position ahead of him.

"Hello!" scowled Fallon, helping himself to a seat uninvited. "I see you are still at work, Austin. Where's the young manager?"

"Mr. Floyd has taken a day off, sir. He appeared as if he was all broken up this morning—probably on account of Mr. Banker's sickness."

"Not a bit, Austin! The fellow's been setting his whole heart on falling gracefully into the old man's shoes at his death; and now it is pretty evident that he will not be accommodated, he is totally off his base."

"I supposed Miss Banker would be the heir?"

"Not much! Old Joshua is too shrewd to let his wealth be fingered by a woman. Of course, the girl gets a proper allowance, and—I get the rest of it."

"You?"

"Emphatically, I—at least, it is pretty positive it will be me, for the old man is down on Floyd."

"What for?"

"Because he has positively refused to wed the girl, Belle."

"Pshaw! You don't say so!"

"But, I do. Isn't he a ninny, though? But he is! All the same, it's a lucky go for my otherwise poor prospects. As soon as I come into possession I shall make some large changes here. I shall get a new superintendent, and—"

"But, why will I not answer, sir? I know the whole details of the business," Austin exclaimed.

"Well, you're rather too conscientious to suit me, I think. Still, if you want to earn the position, in you go as business manager, at a salary of fifteen hundred per annum."

Austin's eyes sparkled.

"It doesn't always pay to be too conscientious, I find," he admitted. "What will I have to do to earn this position?"

"I will explain. It hangs just on a balance whether Floyd succeeds to the old man's wealth or I. Should any damaging circumstances arise against him, that would dash his prospects, while I would become heir. See? Supposing an embezzlement of ten or fifteen thousand dollars were discovered by you and reported to the gov'nor? You could easily arrange it."

"Perhaps; but there might be trouble."

"No fear of it whatever. You say the word, and I'll set my fellows after Floyd, and I'll guarantee he'll not turn up for a year or two. Don't you see that, his being missing, and the money gone too, will be indisputable evidence against him?"

"True. I think I can fix it. There was a cash sale a short time ago of three thousand dollars, and another of ten, none of which is yet down on the books. I'll appropriate the money, and put the sales on yesterday's page."

"Good idea! You are the only one now having access to the books?"

"At present—yes."

"Then get to work, and after closing hours

to-night report to the old man. I'll at once set a couple of trusty 'smellers' after my dear cousin. Ha, ha! I have the game in my hands, still more surely than before, you bet!"

And after he had gone, Austin sat in a long, deep study, occasionally ciphering upon a paper in front of him.

CHAPTER IX.

TRAPPED.

THE old codger who had occupied the stall in the Ridge avenue summer-garden, was, as the reader has no doubt surmised, none other than Detective Hickey in disguise, and he let not a word that was uttered escape his hearing.

The Satan's Social was an organized party of blacklegs, and their fame was not unknown to him, or in fact to any of the city detectives. But, so fox-like were their movements, that it had been heretofore, impossible to locate their rendezvous, or capture any of the gang at their villainous work.

Until to-day, Hickey had never suspected Jack Fallon of being connected with the jilbirds who were supposed to comprise the Social, and now, instead of being merely a member, he was evidently a ringleader!

After digesting what he had heard, Dan made up his mind to attend the meeting of this club of rogues. It might be a risky undertaking, but it would not be his first risk in pursuing his profession.

He thought he saw his way clear. Grogan's disguise was to be left at the Bingham, and probably he would not call for it until after six; so the detective proposed to go before six and get the package. At six the clerks changed for the night. When Grogan came, the new clerk would find no package, but an important letter for Mr. Grogan.

After leaving Sewer Sam, Hickey studied carefully over the plan until he had arranged his course of procedure; accordingly, at twenty minutes of six o'clock, he repaired to the Bingham House, on Market street, and asked at the office if a package had been left there for Pete Grogan?

After examination of several parcels the right one was found.

"Are you a guest, sir?" the clerk asked. "If not, I shall have to charge you a dollar."

Hickey cheerfully paid the dollar, explaining that he would probably stop there in a few days.

Taking the package he proceeded to Broad and Chestnut streets, where he sent the following telegram to Pete Grogan at the Bingham House:

"No meeting to-night. Don't come to No.—; but, immediately to vicinity of Banker warehouse. Wait there. Important. J. F."

"That will effectually throw him off track, so that he will get to no meeting of Satan's Social to-night!" Hickey congratulated himself.

He then proceeded to his Sansom street office, and locking himself in, proceeded to examine the disguise. It consisted of a long, dark gown, such as is worn by Catholic priests, a brown straw hat, dark gloves, and a full, cloth mask, of jet-black, provided with eye-boles and an aperture to breathe through.

A very clever disguise, indeed, under which these apparent priests could walk through the streets without a suspicion as to their real character—could enter the dark alley, don their masks and pass into the den, without danger of exciting comment.

An examination of the directions inclosed with the disguise confirmed the detective's purpose and plan of action proposed.

The mode of gaining entrance was three raps on the rear gate, and the password, "matre."

Waiting until dark—and it was one of the blackest nights of the season—Hickey took his bundle and set out for the neighborhood of the crooked den on Pine street.

The house ran back rather deep to an alley, dark and narrow, which in turn had its course from cross-street to cross-street.

When he arrived in the neighborhood of the alley, no one was in sight in either direction, and he took advantage of an excellent opportunity to disguise himself. He then entered the alley and groped his way along to the gate in the rear of Lucille La Verd's residence. Here he paused and gave three raps. What would be the result of his daring venture? he asked himself. He knew he was venturing into a haunt of hardened criminals and ruffians of the worst order, who would not hesitate to cut his throat did they discover his identity.

Yet, he had gone so far it would not do to retreat, for some one was coming up the alley.

He was in for it sure, and the only way was to push on.

The gate was opened by some invisible person, whose hoarse voice growled out:

"Password!"

"Matre!" Hickey answered.

"Pass in, Mr. Grogan!"

The detective obeyed.

A thought struck him. There was a change of password for each member, then.

Proceeding into the kitchen of the house, he found no one, so he continued on into the dining-room, where three men, disguised like himself, were punishing a bottle of wine.

"Is that you, Grogan?" Fallon's voice asked.

"Shure, an' 'tis!" Hickey replied, perfectly imitating Grogan's brogue.

"Then, come and join us."

"Divil a bit, I will. It's full up to the neck I am, now, of funeral whisky."

"You're in luck. Where's McCarty?"

"Dunno. Haven't seen him."

"Well, as soon as he comes, we'll get down to business."

Hickey took a seat, feeling sure that his disguise would conceal his identity.

In a little while, another of the order entered, and then, all hands arose, and Hickey followed them down a flight of stairs into what in most cases would have been called a cellar. But in this case it was different. Instead of a rough-walled excavation, it was an elegantly fitted up store, with counters on either side, and shelving. The place was brilliantly lighted, and a couple of women, one of whom was Lucille La Verd, were behind the respective counters.

The shelving on one side of the room, was filled with goods of almost every conceivable description, from the rarest laces and dress goods down to the toys that a penny would buy, in a notion store.

There were also show cases, with jewelry glittering in them; there were the peculiar tin boxes and striped tundles, such as pack-peddlers usually tote through the country, and here and there a box already packed. One end of the counter was packed high with odds and ends of ready-made clothing, for either sex.

On the opposite side of the room, the counter was loaded with neatly wrapped parcels, with tags attached to them, and at one end of this counter, was a cashier's desk, which Mrs. La Verd evidently attended, it being upon her side.

Hickey's keen gaze took in the whole scene, and his comprehension was equally as quick as his gaze.

The house that was suspected of being "crooked," was "crooked"—or, more properly, the ones that made it their rendezvous and "fence" were accomplished thieves, for it was a haven for stolen goods.

Every city has its regiment of professional thieves. Those making large hauls, are not deprived of their original title "thief;" the petty practitioners, who pick up and off with whatever they can lay their hands on, are dubbed shop-lifters or sneaks, and it is safe to say that of either class of these pests, the Quaker City has more than her share.

Not a day passes but what the papers publish a chapter of robberies, and in nine instances out of ten, the perpetrators are never found.

The public ask where do all these goods go to? Ask your detectives.

Look at your pawn broker establishments, and your "original misfit stores," and be apprised; contemplate the astonishing bargains offered you, where, for a third real value, you can get your wants supplied.

But even these establishments are forced to be cautious, to which fact may be traced the origin of the "private supply rooms," such as that which Dan Hickey had now unearthed.

How is it worked under the very eyes of the police?

For answer, note the large numbers of ragmen and pack-peddlers, who haunt the alleys, and in a peculiar short length of time, pick up or dispose of a huge bundle of what an ordinary observer would take to be their stock in trade.

Of course, the majority of rag pickers must not be included; but the cunning knights of the long finger have their own "pickers and lifters," and their own itinerant peddlers who purchase their goods at the regular "station," and work them off about the country.

Although Dan Hickey was aware that several such dens, under various disguises, existed in the city, he had never before entered one, and he was, therefore, not a little surprised at what he saw.

Fallon proceeded at once to Madam La Verd's

counter after reaching the underground apartment, the others following.

"Well, have you got matters all fixed up?" he demanded.

She smiled.

"Certainly. Everything is arranged, or will be, in time."

"Then let's have the money, as some of the boys want to get away."

She stepped over to the desk, and came back with five well-sealed and well-filled envelopes of a large size.

These she handed to Fallon, who, after examining them, and distributing one to each, kept one himself.

The one given Hickey was addressed to Pete Grogan, underneath whose name was written: "Five thousand dollars."

When the division was completed, Fallon said:

"Now, boys, I suppose you all understand that this will be our last meeting for some time to come, as this house is not a safe place to operate in any longer. What goods are now on hand have been sold, and will be removed tomorrow. When the madam and I agree upon another and safer rendezvous, you will be duly notified, and matters can go on as heretofore. Until then, the Social is dismissed."

"What is to be done with the prisoner?" Lucille demanded. "It will not do to leave him here, and it will be almost impossible to get him away."

"Bah! Leave him where he is! It is not likely any one would find him right away, and if they do, it cannot matter."

"You mistake. He knows much about the Banker affair!"

"True. I had nearly forgotten that. If he were to get free he might play Satan with me. I see but one thing to do with him, curse the luck! and that is—give him a rap over the head, from which he will not recover in twenty years, Rip Van Winkle like?"

"That's the best and surest," Lucille declared; "but who will do the job?"

"Whoever I order!" Fallon growled, "if it comes to that. But I'll settle it. Throw out a box of matches, and we'll all pull in rotation. The one pulling the last match has got to go down in the pit, do the job, and will receive a thousand dollars for it. This is fair; isn't it, boys?"

"You bet it is!" Jamie McGilligan's voice responded. "I hope I'm after drawing the last match."

And the others grunted their assent—all except the pseudo Grogan, who did not know whether to grunt or not; he certainly did not like the way things were shaping.

What if he should draw the last match? He would have to do the murderous deed!

But where was "the pit"? He had no idea, unless it was under them, and even if it were, how was he to know where to find the entrance to it without inquiring, which would give him away?

Again, even should he find it, it was not at all likely but what one or more of the human wretches would follow him, to see that he did the job in an effective manner.

Any way he looked at the matter he found himself in a fix, and the perspiration started out upon his forehead in drops, as he saw the matches spilled out upon the counter.

There was no use of backing out, so he stepped up with the others.

As he did so he could look behind the counter, and there saw a trap-door in the floor.

This eased his mind a little.

Perhaps he could manage the difficulty yet, without any trouble.

"Pull your match in turn, gents," Fallon commanded. "There is a thousand dollars in it for some one, as soon as the cursed detective is silenced."

Hickey pulled fourth, in rotation.

One by one the matches grew less, until but the last one remained, and it was Hickey's turn to pull!

"Pull!" Fallon cried, thrusting the muzzle of his pistol against Hickey's head. "You draw the last match, and have got to kill your own pard, Dan Hickey!"

CHAPTER X.

ON THE TRAIL.

ERNEST FLOYD made his way direct to the Banker mansion, after leaving Sewer Sam and Hickey, as fast as a hack could carry him.

His spirits were now in a far different state than when he had left in the morning, even though he still felt a burning repugnance at the thought of again meeting the beautiful hypocrite who had already once played him false.

On his arrival at the mansion, he was admitted by the old servant, Sambo.

"Well, Sambo, what's the news?" Ernest asked, hurriedly. "How is the sick?"

"Deed, Marse Floyd, I se can't tole you. De young missy done gone tell me to keep down-stairs. Den dar's a gentleman come, an' been shut up in de sick-room for seberal hours."

"Was the doctor here?"

"Yes, sah. He in de sick-room, too."

Without waiting to hear more, Ernest went up-stairs, and entered his uncle's apartment.

The patient lay upon the bed, looking by far worse than in the morning; indeed, he appeared nearer to death than before.

The room was very close.

Doctor Fitch was seated at a small table, with a small laboratory of vials and glasses before him. His brows were deeply knitted, and he never once looked up at Ernest's entrance.

Near the head of the bed sat another man. He was busy filling out some legal-looking document. A glance at his shrewd face apprised Ernest that the man was Al Shields, the noted criminal lawyer.

Near the end of the room, by a window, sat Madge. Her face was pale, her eyes wore a peculiar, hunted glitter, her dainty slippered foot tapped the carpet rather impatiently.

Mr. Banker brightened up a little at sight of his nephew.

"You are back, my boy, at last? I am glad, for I feel that I am gradually losing ground. Ernest, this is my attorney, Mr. Shields."

The two shook hands, and then Mr. Banker went on:

"Ernest, my boy, I have torn up the will I made a few days ago, in the presence of Messrs. Shields and Fitch. Wills have caused more litigation, of late years, than almost any other kind of legal documents, and for my part, I want no trouble over my property after I am gone. Therefore, in consideration of the receipt of one dollar, I shall, by signing the documents on this table, deed to you all of my real estate and personal property, excepting my bank account, which goes to my daughter, Belle—this, of course, providing you wed my daughter Belle, if she consents to marry you. I am ready to sign the deeds now, and Mr. Shields has a paper for you to sign, binding you to wed my daughter, under the conditions named."

"It is simply a matter of business. One document qualifies the other. If no marriage takes place within three months neither of you gets a cent of the property, Mr. Shields being authorized to destroy the documents, and to hand over to the trustees of Girard College a paper which gives that estate everything now belonging to me."

"Well, I see you have everything fixed your own way, uncle," Ernest said, with a smile. "Do you not think you are wronging your daughter? She may not desire to be made a party to such a contract, in which case you would be leaving her penniless."

"True; but she is willing now—ay, she par ly gave her consent m nths ago."

This was news to Ernest, and he could scarcely control his amazement. Did the beautiful girl, who had nursed him through his sickness, love him?

"Come, young man, be quick!" Shields interposed. "Moments are money to me."

"Let's see the document I am to sign," the young man demanded, rather grimly.

It was given him, and he read it over carefully—then read it again.

"I see by this that I am to wed your daughter, Miss Belle Banker, providing she is agreeable?"

"Exactly."

"And it is understood that she is agreeable?"

"It is!"

"Then the ceremony will take place here tomorrow evening at eight, when Mr. Shields can be present to close this rather strange matrimonial bargain by delivering up the deeds. I will sign now. Uncle, you please do likewise."

Both papers were then signed, and witnessed by Dr. Fitch, who hastily returned to his medical experiments.

He uttered an exclamation as he did so.

"Open the windows wide, instantly!" he cried, "and prepare another room for the patient. I will take sole charge of him henceforth!"

Ernest quickly obeyed, and rung for Sambo, to whom he gave the order.

In ten minutes the sick man was removed to another room and closeted with the eminent physician—no one else being allowed to enter.

During the excitement Madge had slipped

from the room, but Ernest had caught a glimpse of her face, and it was deathly white.

Knowing that his uncle would now have the best of care, he made up his mind to hunt up Sewer Sam, so as not to be late to accompany him.

In the hall below, as he was about to leave the house, he encountered Madge.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To attend to some business connected with our marriage," he answered. "If you are not prepared for the occasion you had better let Sambo telephone for one of Wanamaker's men, who will take your order and fit you out on short notice."

"Thank you for your thoughtfulness, but, since I am denied admission to papa's room, I will go shopping myself. I do not need much."

"The hypocritical viper!" Ernest mused, as he hurried away. "If everything works right there will be a dramatic scene at the house tomorrow evening."

Instead of going to the ferry-wharf direct, he took a roundabout course, and visited the summer-garden on South street.

The hard-looking customer, Jim Banker, was still there, fast asleep, but Sewer Sam was nowhere to be seen.

Having nothing else to do, Floyd sauntered along the street, and soon spied the young ferret just emerging from an ammunition-store.

"Bin gittin' 'heeled'!" he grinned, tapping his hip-pocket significantly. "No tellin' but we may strike a nest o' hornets. Are ye loaded, ready ter go off?"

"I have a revolver."

"Good. The old chap asleep?"

"He was a bit ago."

"Then let's go git them hundred plates of oysters ye remarked about. Tell ye, a feller wants ter enter Jersey on a full stomach, or them frogs will jest yell 'surloin! surloin!' in yer ear, till ye can't remember ye had a meal in a month."

Accordingly they adjourned to an oyster saloon opposite the garden, and Floyd ordered the waiter to give the young detective what oysters he could eat.

"Don't cacklerate the old hulk will get under sail much 'fore dark," the gamin remarked, "and I don't know but a feller might as well make it pleasant fer the bivalves as ter set around doin' nothin'."

And as plateful after plateful disappeared with astonishing rapidity, Ernest could but wonder what sort or species of a gourmand he had agreed to back.

It was indeed growing dark when Sam leaned back with a sigh and wiped his mouth, while he looked wistfully at the clock.

"I'm afraid I sha'n't have time to make a good square meal this time, but we'll make up for the deficiency when we have more leisure," he said, as the waiter handed Ernest a check for two dollars and a half. "Hal there goes his nibs, now!"

Banker had left the garden, and was hurrying rapidly away toward the Delaware.

In a couple of minutes Sam and Ernest were following him at an unsuspecting distance.

In half an hour the trio were aboard the ferry-boat for Gloucester, but our two stowaways were careful to keep out of sight of the hummer, who was now evidently as sober as a judge.

At Gloucester they left the boat behind him, and dogged him at a respectful distance. The intense darkness that had by this time fully settled over the earth rendered it easy to keep closer to him, however, than would have otherwise been prudent.

Straight out of town into the country went the men, at a gait which at least proved that he had had experience as a pedestrian.

When the town was a mile behind, he paused suddenly and looked back.

The two pursuers had taken to cover in the nick of time.

The hummer did not move for nearly ten minutes, but continued to look intently back.

"Smells a mice!" Sam muttered. "We shall have to keep among the darker shadows, I allow."

The man finally went on.

The pursuers waited until they could barely discern him in the distance and then took up the trail.

He finally disappeared altogether.

"We can renew steam now," the boy said.

In a short time rapid walking brought them once more in sight of him.

Thus continued the journey for two hours, when he again disappeared.

Five minutes later the pursuers came to a

cross-road leading into a wild bushy tract of country.

Sam got down and examined the sandy surface, and made the discovery that Banker had taken the south branch.

Another hour of tiresome walking brought them to the end of the road, and here was a rough shanty, which evidently had been built for the use of hunters during the bird season.

There was no sign of life about it, but this did not deceive the young ferret.

"We will make a roundabout circuit and approach from the opposite side of the place," he decided.

This was cautiously done, and when beside the shanty they paused and listened.

They could hear the low murmuring of voices, but could not catch a word that was said.

"Shall we wait till he goes away?" Ernest asked, anxiously.

"Yes. We will then have it all our own way. He won't stay long."

His surmise was correct. In less than half an hour Jim Banker was heard to leave the shanty and shuffle off down the road.

Sewer Sam shadowed him for a considerable distance to make sure that he was really on his way back to Gloucester.

When satisfied on this point, he returned to the shanty, and, in company with Floyd, entered it, for the door was not locked.

"Who is there?" an anxious voice cried, as they flung open the door.

"Visitors!" Sewer Sam answered, sententiously, as he lit a bull's eye lantern he had brought along.

"Visitors from the city, mum—so spread out yer banquet. I am Sewer Samuel, eskwire, private detective, boot black, an' champion oyster paralyzer of Philadelfy. This fellow with me is familiarly dubbed Ernest Floyd."

"Ernest Floyd!"

"Yes, cousin, it is I!" the young man said, striding forward; "an' I am here to release you, and prevent a fearful wrong from being done."

Sam had the light turned on by this time, and a view of the situation could be obtained. There was no furniture whatever in the place, and Miss Banker was securely lashed to an upright beam, which supported the timbers of the upper floor.

The meeting of the cousins was a most cordial one, and it is unnecessary to state that no time was lost in setting the fair prisoner at liberty.

Explanations were then made, which it is not worth while to detail.

Until informed by Jim Banker, Miss Banker had had no idea of the terrible plot against her, Fallon having, it seems, left her before she recovered her consciousness. Banker had promised to come for her as soon as he could get a carriage.

Ernest apprised her of the whole plot, so far as he knew, and what he didn't know Sewer Sam helped him out with—so that in a short time Miss Banker understood the whole situation.

"It all seems like a romance—such as we read about in the papers," she said. "And now that you have found the real heiress, what do you propose to do?"

"Marry you, of course, 'cordin' ter contract!" put in Samuel. "Oh! but *won't* thar be a sensation when we waltz you in, an' forbid the bans?"

"You keep out of this affair, Sam!" Floyd spoke up sharply. "I will arrange the remainder of the matter."

"Bet ye a hundred raw, ye won't!" the boy declared, hotly. "Hick give me power o' attorney to push ther case through, and I want my say!"

"Well, go ahead, and have your say, then," Floyd said.

"Kerect. That hits me right where I allus stores away my oysters—right in my buzzam. There's nothing I like ter so well, as talk, 'less it is ter eat eyesters or consumptive clams. But, ter purseed—I have charge of ther case, this division. Now, I consulted wi' ther boss, an' hev heard the substantial part o' what's goin' on up at ther mansion."

"Exactly."

"Well, now, Mr. Dead-in-Earnest Floyd, you go right ahead, and get ready tew marry yer wife over ag'in. Git yer pound-cake and all."

"Young man, be less talky. This young lady has something to learn yet!" Ernest said, growing pale.

"In regard to the unfortunate marriage of my cousin and yourself?—oh, no!" Miss Banker cried. "Do my reckless uncle justice to know

that he explained all about that affair to me. Then, too, I had an inkling of something of the kind before this."

"I understand. You see what a quandary your father's resolve leaves matters in."

"You say my father may recover?"

"There can be but little doubt of it."

"Jest let me pipe in," exclaimed Sam. "You go right ahead an' lead the false gal before the minister. Then there'll be a transformation scene, Black Crook style. The firm o' Kelley, Hickey & Co. will then waltz in, fetchin' Miss Banker, here, an' a heap of other evidence; an' instead o' nuptial bands, there'll be steel bands. Savy? We've got it all cut an' dried. Arter we collar the coves, you an' Miss Belle heer can fix up yer affairs to suit yerselve—we o' the perfesh hev nothin' ter do wi' sich like."

"The boy is sensible," Belle Banker smilingly remarked. "I want to see this woman publicly shamed, if there is any shame in her."

"But, by what right can the marriage be forbidden?"

"Leave that to Danyel," grinned Sewer Sam. "It happens that Miss Madge La Verd, *alias* Banker, had several husbands before she tackled you, and one of 'em was yer uncle's valet—Butler!"

"Boy, you are mistaken!"

"Nary. Danyel has proof!"

"Thank God! Then, I am free."

"As a clam. An' now, as it are useless ter purseed back to Phila, afore folks is up, I'm goin' ter tumble off fer a nap. An active brain of ther dimensions of mine must hev sleep and oysters."

And in ten minutes the gamin detective was snoring like a trooper.

No sleep visited the eyes of Ernest and Belle, for they finished the night out, in conversation.

What was the theme, or of how tender a nature it was, is not for us to say, but by the time Sam awoke, at daybreak, I believe it was settled between them, that the minister who came to marry Ernest to Madge Banker, should not be cheated out of his fee.

Half an hour after sunrise, the trio set out, on foot, for Gloucester.

CHAPTER XI.

HICKEY MAKES TERMS.

DURING his career as a detective, Hickey had been encompassed by great danger, in a number of instances, but he could not remember that he had ever been caught in a much worse fix than he now was.

The words uttered by Jack Fallon, which ended a recent chapter, apprised the detective that he was recognized, cunning as he had been.

"Oh! you're a real jewel!" Fallon gritted, snatching away the mask. "You thought your telegraph biz would fool Grogan, didn't you? but, as it happens, Grogan had his eye-teeth cut, years ago. Your telegram made a good taper for him to light his pipe with."

"Did it?"

"To be sure it did. I suspected you, up on Ridge avenue, and told the boys to look out for sharks!"

"Well, you caught what you were fishing for, I suppose?"

"Why, certainly, and a rarer prize a band of long-fingered sports couldn't ask to catch. You're a real prize, Daniel, and we intend to treat you as such."

"I am glad to hear that. It isn't often I fall in with such a pleasant gathering. S'pose you haven't anything to drink about the shebang?"

"If we have, we fondle and caress it ourselves!" with a coarse laugh. "You don't suppose we treat our enemies to drinks?"

"Enemies, probably not—friends, certainly, you should."

"Oh! then, you're a friend?"

"I'm a friend, when it pays to be a friend."

"Bah! none of that blarney! You've got into the wrong crowd to do any eye-closing business. There's no dead men in the gang. We're all up to the times."

"If I hadn't believed that, to-night wouldn't have caught me here."

"Oh! I suppose not. What did you come here for? A man of your repute would naturally be credited with better sense."

"I came here for two purposes: one was to make money—the other to cheat a rival out of his prey."

Fallon pricked up his ears.

"I guess I don't quite pick up your meaning," he responded.

"Of course you don't!" with a sarcastic smile.

"I even doubt if I can make you believe that, but for me, you will be in prison before day-break!"

"Ha! ha! that *would* be funny, if you could stuff that down us."

"Think so, if you like; but before you draw any positive conclusions, will you let me give you a few pointers?"

"Sail ahead! I'll reef you, when I think you have sufficiently exercised your lungs."

"Well, to begin with: I suppose you are aware that there are several branches of the detective business in town—that is, several distinct firms or companies."

"Yes, I am perfectly informed on that point."

"You know that the police and city force, operated by the city government, is the strongest."

"Certainly."

"You are aware that through the inefficiency of this body, it has been necessary for responsible citizens to encourage private detective agencies, from the fact that more satisfactory results are invariably obtained from this source."

"Go on."

"Well, among this latter class, Miller & Sharkey have for a time stood first on the list."

"You bet."

"Pinkerton has a few men prowling around, but men of your stamp pronounce them N. G!" A chuckle told the shot had hit.

"The Chicago Secret Service came next; then the Merchant and Tradesmen's force."

"Correct."

"Then, all of a sudden, a private little snap, known as Kelley, Hickey & Co., was mentioned. The name did not wither and die, but grew like a thistle, even as the firm thrived. The other forces noticed a loss of business—Miller & Sharkey, in particular. They did not do a tenth of their usual work. Perhaps it was owing to the decrease of crime—perhaps owing to the existence of K. H. & Co. Anyhow, a spirited rivalry sprung up between the two forces, and has grown to be something like a feud."

"Yes?"

"As I tell you. All's fair in love or war, 'tis said, and I dare presume that either side would prefer to let a criminal escape, rather than that the rival side should have the glory of securing the prize."

Fallon was deeply interested. Hardened, desperate man of the world though he was, the persuasive tongue of the detective was beginning to tell upon him.

"Now, understand me," Hickey went on, his tone stern, his face aglow, and his eyes flashing, "I am not giving you blarney. I'd hang the lot of you to-morrow, if profitable. But, I don't believe it is. I'll acknowledge that you are skilled rogues; otherwise I should not speak as freely as I do. I came here to-night, as I did, to secure the liberty of my partner, Kelley. Had I desired to pull the den, could I not have easily done it? Certainly I could. But I did not choose so to do. Are you aware, Jack Fallon, that a large reward is offered, privately, to the detectives of Philadelphia, for the capture of the ringleaders of this gang?"

"I don't know that there is!"

"Probably you doubt it?"

"Proceed with what you have to say!"

"Oh! you are non-committal, eh? Well, perhaps you are not aware, then, that this place has been under detective surveillance for the past ten days, both under the auspices of Miller & Sharkey, and Kelley & Hickey."

"I am listening—you are talking!" Fallon growled, a hunted look about his eyes.

"It's little I have to say, in conclusion. We were to pull the den, in a day or two. Miller & Sharkey are to pull it to-night!"

"Curse you, you lie!"

"Be your own judge, before you are rash. What time have you?"

"Half-past eight."

"Correct. Now, send a man to look out of the front of the house, and ascertain if there are not three persons opposite, in citizen's garb, conversing together—also a couple of policemen in the immediate neighborhood."

"McGilligan, go see!" ordered Fallon, at once.

The ruffian hastened away, and for several minutes a grim silence reigned, in that underground apartment.

Then, McGilligan came back.

"That's the ticket, Cap!" he answered. "The fellow is kerect."

"Now, McGilligan, go to either terminus of the back alley, and report what you see," Hickey suggested.

"Go!" Fallon repeated.

The fellow was back, shortly.

"The same as front!" was his report.

Fallon turned on Hickey, with a savage oath. "So you have got us cornered, eh?" he hissed, his face aflame with rage.

"No, not yet. My turn comes next," the detective returned, dauntlessly. "You are dealing with Miller & Sharkey, now. I am here to free you, on conditions. After I set you at liberty, you have five hours to lose yourself. Then I shall renew my hunt."

"What is your object in freeing us?"

"To cheat the rival force out of my prey."

"Well, you are a cool one. Pray explain how you propose to free us, with the premises surrounded."

"Easily. At one end of the alley, my men are stationed instead of Sharkey's. Sharkey's men are somewhere, blind drunk."

"You'd make a valuable addition to our profession. But, name your conditions!"

"First, release Kelley. Secondly, follow me." There you have it, all in a nutshell."

"Follow you into some other trap?"

"I limited your time."

Fallon took a turn up and down the apartment. His face was aflame with passion, born, mainly, out of chagrin at being thus defeated, when the game seemed his very own.

At length he called Lucille aside, and they had an animated conversation, which lasted several minutes.

Hickey waited, expectantly.

Would the thing work?

He was making a bold venture, on an uncertainty. The men stationed outside, were undoubtedly Miller & Sharkey's. He had caught an inkling, that afternoon, that a raid was to take place upon an establishment, in the same block that night. Thus, he had jumped to the conclusion that a force would be in the neighborhood.

The question now was, would he be able to all the party through, without being halted.

Fallon soon approached.

"It seems evident that we must knuckle under to you, this time," he confessed, "but we expect you to hang to your promise."

"My word is good."

"It had better be. McGilligan, release the prisoner."

Going behind the counter, McGilligan descended into a sub-cellar, and soon returned, accompanied by Kelley, who looked but little the worse for his confinement.

His gaze and Hickey's met for an instant, and they understood each other.

"Now, then," Dan said, "we shall have to be expeditious. The woman, and you, Fallon, can safely leave by the front way, and take your course, up town. The remainder of the party we will take out by the rear."

"Mind, if you are fooling us, your life will answer for it!"

"Do as I bid and never fear!" was the firm answer.

Then, all hands went up-stairs, and Fallon and Lucille took their departure by the front way.

Hickey then led the retreat through the rear alley, and soon had his trio of rogues out upon the street.

Their debouch upon the street did not attract the attention of the other force, and five minutes put them out of the neighborhood.

"Now, you fellows can go!" Hickey said. "Hunt up Fallon, and tell him to look out for himself, for after I get back from New York, I want to see him."

The trio shuffled away, but they had not gone a dozen yards, before they were gobbled up by a posse of Pinkerton's men, who wanted them for burglary.

Of this Hickey and Kelley knew nothing.

"What did you make such a move for?" Kelley asked, when they were safe within their office.

"It was life or death. We'd have never got out of that den, any other way."

"The game's lost though!"

John Kelley was a man who would rather suffer torture than weaken to an enemy.

"Those three fellows can be nabbed almost any day; and as for Fallon, the fellow will never leave the city, while there is a chance to get a hold upon that fat fortune of Banker's."

They concluded to await the return of Sewer Sam and Ernest Floyd, before taking any further action.

After leaving the den, on Pine street, Jack Fallon and Lucille went to the former's bachelor quarters, on Race street.

Scarcely a word was exchanged, until they were seated opposite each other, with a table

and lamp between them, not to mention a bottle, and glasses.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Fallon, helping himself to a liberal glass of brandy.

"Just what I have thought, all along!" was the fierce reply. "The jig's up, as far's this city is concerned."

"Looks like it. It is a queer thing, this detective business."

"Malice is a great instrument, very often."

"Then, you think it was on account of rivalry?"

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"Yet he will be apt to hunt us."

"True, but that will take time. All we want, is to see that thing take place, to-morrow."

It might well be added here, that, after Ernest Floyd had left the Banker mansion, to join Sewer Sam, Madge had paid a flying visit to her mother, and informed her of what was to take place the next evening, inviting her and Fallon to be present.

"Yes, if the thing works—Dash it I am growing doubtful how it is going to turn out!"

Lucille took a drink of the liquor, and reflected.

"There is only one way a cent can ever be got out of the property. Two lives must be taken. Murder is a hard thing, Jack Fallon. Wicked, worldly woman though I am, I would shudder at such a necessity."

"Bah! you're chicken hearted. A million dollars is worth more than a hundred lives. I can easily fix it up for Ernest Floyd, curse him."

"Yes, but there's another—Butler!"

"The dumb mule! He's on our side, too."

"Be not too sure. Still waters run deep. That very Butler, is Madge's true husband!"

"What do you say?" and Fallon leaped to his feet, in a passion.

"It is true."

"Then, were I to wed her, I would not be her legal husband?"

"Butler must go, first!"

Fallon paced the floor, his face a study, in the ill humor reflected upon it.

"Well, I'll do a great deal," he gritted. "If you two try shenanigan on me I'll thrust the real girl forward. I'm going, now—won't be back till morning. I sent Agrippus, the dude, to watch Floyd, and strangle him if a chance offers."

"Fool! Do you want to stop the marriage, and spoil all?"

"It's little I care. I half suspect you two are trying to play me false, anyhow, and—"

He did not finish, but opened the door and left the house.

Lucille made no move to follow him. To use vulgar parlance—"she had got him down fine."

When greatly excited or worried, he often had spells, that he hardly knew his own actions or sayings.

So Lucille sat at the table, and drank occasionally, and reflected. Finally she drew a huge wallet from her bosom, and began to count out bank-bills, both old and new, but nearly all of large denominations.

"All mine!" she said, in a triumphant tone—"all mine! and for it my soul!"

Her eyes suddenly shot up, in her head, and she gave a gurgling sort of gasp. Then a purple tinge dawned upon her lips—her face expressed suffocation.

Ten minutes later she lay back in her chair, limp and lifeless.

A dusky form glided to the table.

The money was quickly appropriated.

"Now, then, I'll turn on the gas, and the coroner's verdict will be death by suffocation from gas. Ha! ha!"

A few moments later, and the figure was far away from the house, where death reigned as the nocturnal attendant.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

THE trip of our trio of friends back to Philadelphia was not destined to be without noteworthy incident.

Jack Fallon had not lied when he said that he had put the Dude upon the track of young Floyd.

Aside from the pals who had comprised Satan's Social, the schemer had confederates all over the city, so that when he wanted a job "fixed up" he did not have to proceed far to find one of his tools.

Imlay the Dude was one of this class, having a pedigree which classed him rather above Fallon's other pals.

He had sought Fallon something like a month

before our story, armed with a letter from a noted New York cracksman, introducing him as a party who could be trusted at any responsible job. Jack had employed him on several occasions, and so faithfully had he performed the tasks assigned him, that the Satans' chief had put him on the trail of Ernest Floyd, with the order to tap him over the head in such a way that he would totally forget himself.

And the sight of a hundred-dollar bill caused the Dude, as he was best known, to post away in delight.

He went first to the warehouse, then to the Banker mansion, and struck the trail by seeing Ernest Floyd leave the house.

After that he hung to the trail like a leech.

It is scarcely worth while for us to detail his movements, but suffice to say that he shadowed Ernest and Sewer Sam all the way to the lone shanty, and saw them leave it with the rescued Miss Banker.

Laying his course, with the aid of a compass, he made a cut across the country, and came out several miles ahead of the trio, on the main road.

After beating about for a time, he at last found a sheltered nook, which he calculated would answer his purpose, as it afforded him secretion, close to the trail, or road, and gave him an uninterrupted view in either direction.

As he did not expect them for some time to come, he seated himself on the ground, and drew a long, greasy, hempen rope from his pocket. It was slender in size, but very strong, and to one end was fastened a bullet shaped leaden weight, that would have tipped the scales at a couple of pounds, or more.

It was plainly a strangler's apparatus, and the Dude regarded it with a curious expression of countenance.

"The devil's own arrangement it is!" he muttered. "I never used it but once, and then I failed—indeed, I never tried to kill a man but once, and then I pushed him upon his head in the street. Luckily, a tough head saved him."

A flood of memories seemed to absorb his mind for a time.

Suddenly he started from his reverie, and gazed down the road. In the distance he saw three figures approaching.

The time was nearly at hand when he must do the deed he had bargained to do—murder Ernest Floyd!

A shudder passed over him as he contemplated the enormity of the crime.

"I was never cut out for a criminal," he said, grimly, "and as such would never make a success. If I fail this time, I'll renounce the business, and forever after lead an honest life, cheating no one out of anything, nor trying to injure any one."

He grasped the rope firmly, at a measured distance from the weight, and waited, his gaze never once leaving the approaching figures.

The nearer they drew, he perceived that they were chatting gayly. Sewer Sam supplying an abundance of his quaint sayings to keep the others in good humor.

"How happy they seem!" the Dude muttered. "They have not the least suspicion of danger. It seems too bad to shut off this fellow's wind, just to satisfy the spite of another."

For a moment he glared at them fiercely, as if to gain courage; then a softer expression crept over his face.

"I'll not do it!" he decided, emphatically. "It's murder, and it's against my grain."

He waited till they were nearly opposite, and then stepped out, and confronted them.

Had it been his intention to take them suddenly by surprise, he would have got grandly left, for Sewer Sam's revolver covered him, almost instantly.

"Whoa up thar, January!" the lad sung out, authoritatively. "Who ye goin' ter lasso, on this bloomin' perarrer?"

"Nobody!" the Dude answered. "I was sent here, for a purpose."

"What purpose?" Ernest demanded, his face flushing with anger.

"To be plain with you, I was sent to trail you to a suitable place, and there strangle you with this!"

And he exhibited the rope and weight to their view.

"Well, I suppose you are here, for that purpose, then?"

"I came here to execute my mission, but when I saw you coming, a minute ago apparently so happy, and innocent of all wrong, I registered an oath before the great Judge, to forswear all badness, and lead a straightforward and honest life. Therefore, instead of

killing you, I make you a present of the instrument with which I was to take your life."

"Throw it down, sir. I am not fond of murderous mementoes. Who sent you on such an errand?"

"Jackson Fallon."

"That settles it. As we may need a little evidence, in the case against Jacky, ye kin walk right along in our delightful company, ter Phil-delfy," Sewer Sam said.

"But, you will not get me into any trouble?"

"I'll see that you are not harmed, providing I don't catch you at any tricky moves!" Ernest said.

The Dude promised, faithfully, and then the quartette made its way toward the Quaker City.

The day at the Banker mansion was a busy one, to nearly all concerned.

Ernest arrived home, during the forenoon, bringing in the back with him, a new suit, and a stock of such furnishing goods as he was in need of.

Miss Banker had a number of dress-makers at hand, who were busied in supplying her wants, and Sambo was ordered to put the house in the neatest shape possible.

Butler, the valet, wandered mechanically about the house, with stately mien, apparently determined to retain his position, whether he was wanted or not.

His mood was like the gathering of a tempest which threatened each moment to burst forth.

It did burst, too, about the middle of the afternoon, when he caught Madge alone in the parlor.

She was fixing her hair before a great pier-glass and did not notice him until he was directly behind her, when she gave a nervous little cry and faced about.

"What do you mean by this intrusion, sir?" she demanded angrily, stamping her slippered foot upon the carpet.

"What do I mean?" he sneered. "Why, you're putting on a heap of airs, ain't you? As if I hadn't a perfect right to enter your presence!"

"Certainly you have not. I am astonished that you haven't more discretion."

Something of his ministerial look disappeared in the flame of rage that swept over his face.

"So this is the way I am treated, eh?" he hissed. "You don't condescend to notice me, since you think you have got your foot planted here."

"What are you driving at? What do you mean by this sudden outbreak?"

"You'll likely find out. I want to know what's going on—that's what I want to know."

"You ask a very foolish question," she replied coolly. "I believe you are quite well aware what's going on, Mr. Butler."

"I know only what I have gleaned—that you are going to marry—or think you are—this fellow, Ernest Floyd."

"Of course. I supposed you knew that. It is necessary, as you must know."

"How much do you expect to gain by the adventure?"

"To-night, after our marriage, I am to receive checks for my 'father's' entire bank-accounts, amounting to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"What then?"

"I am not thoroughly posted, but I believe Floyd is to be put away, so that I inherit the whole business."

"In order to fix this you will have then to bestow your hand upon that rascal, Fallon?"

"Yes. He will demand that. If I were to refuse he would mighty quick oust me out of my present position by producing Belle."

"Then I'm to remain in the background and allow all this interesting business to take place, and with Job-like patience never make a demur? That's the racket, is it?"

"Your good judgment should have saved you from asking the question!"

"Well, I must say it is a very pleasant thing for me to contemplate. A man, of course, can look on with angelic resignation and see the partner of his bosom wed whosoever she chooses; indeed, his heart must thrill with pure bliss at the very idea. Still, a dose of green-backs is often a quieting tonic, I have heard say. What division of to-night's spoils am I supposed to be entitled to? Winter draweth nigh, and I've an idea that the balmy air of Cuba might benefit my health, as the doctors down there are not so much addicted to the use of electrical bracelets as here."

"I was not aware that it was necessary to bargain with you, sir."

"Indeed! You must have a very unexalted opinion of me, then. I see you are in a hurry. Let us understand each other. It is plain as the nose on your pretty face that we were never meant for each other, and that our love for each other could be condensed into a very small space. For my part, anyhow, I am not partial to wives of a dozen husbands, and hence cannot regard you as my partner in the future. The proper thing for both of us would be to get rid of one another."

"You are sensible."

"Of course I am. And now, in order to do the thing up brown, all that is necessary for you to do on receipt of the checks is to call me one side and give me fifty thousand dollars' worth of them properly indorsed. That will effectually rid this country of yours truly, and you will have perfect and undisputed liberty to bestow your wifely affections on whoever you choose."

She reflected a moment. It was possible, she thought, to put him off until after the ceremony.

"I will do it," she assented, "with the understanding that you leave the country at once and forever."

"That I will!" he replied. "It will not be healthy for me in this city much longer, I suspect. But there are so many slips, you know—so many things might happen, that I already have helped myself to ten thousand of the fifty thousand, as I found that amount in your room—taken from your mother's plunder just before you came here, I suppose."

"You have got that money?" she cried, in hot anger; "you been in my room?"

"Certainly—in my wife's own room!" and he smiled like a Mephistopheles.

She evidently was on the point of a terrible outburst of passion, when he glided from the parlor, saying, as he paused at the door:

"I will see you to-morrow. Forty thousand more, my lady, or your beloved husband No. 1 puts in a claim that'll make husband No. 2 howl!" and then was gone.

The look on her face was terrible in its combined anger and chagrin, and she hurried to her room to both hide her excitement and to see if indeed the man had plundered her of the money she had herself stolen from the funds of the Social.

She had not been there long when there came a knock at the door, and she found Sambo awaiting without.

"Marse Jack Fallon at de door, mum, an' insists on seeing you!" the darky said.

"Show him up, you ignorant blockhead! He is to be present at the marriage ceremony."

"Bet de master don't know nuffin' ob de kind," Sambo muttered to himself as he shuffled away.

Jack Fallon soon entered Madge's room.

He was scrupulously attired, and yet with all his good raiment did not look at ease.

"Well, how does the land lay?" he demanded, as soon as he was seated.

"All lovely, thus far," Madge replied. "Everything will be ready in time."

"How is the gov'nor?"

"No reports. The doctor has been shut up with him ever since last night. Where is mamma?"

"In Baltimore."

"What?"

"In Baltimore. We had to vamose the den last night, and all got off lucky but the madam, and she was tracked so hot that her only alternative was to skip."

"Are you lying to me, Jack Fallon?"

"By no means. A visit to Pine street will prove that Kelley & Hickey have gutted that place!"

"Then there is danger?"

"Loads of it! I am being searched for high and low, and McGilligan and the other boys have been caged already."

"Then why do you come here to endanger me?"

"You are no better than I; and, besides, there is no danger of their trailing me here—at least not until the sermon is over."

"The marriage?"

"Yes; then, with the hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of checks, we will have hard dodging to remain long enough in the city to get them cashed, and get away safely."

"Do you mean that we shall have to go and leave this magnificent property behind?"

"Certainly I do!"

"And why?"

"Because, some way or other, these detectives have got on to the whole plot, and did they suspect the marriage to take place to-

night, they would mighty quick stop the proceedings. Go ahead, and let matters proceed as though nothing had happened!"

"Where is this girl Belle?"

"In a cage where there's no danger of her escaping. Waste not a second thought on her, but proceed with your part of the drama. When all is fixed, fifty and a hundred thousand dollars won't be so awful bad to skip away with. Where is Butler?"

"Gone. He demanded money, and after I gave it to him he skipped. Afraid that he was suspected of complicity in the poisoning."

Fallon was silent for some minutes.

"It will be a miracle if we work through without trouble," he said.

After the arrival of Sewer Sam and his party in Philadelphia he took Miss Banker direct to the Hotel Lafayette, on Broad street, and saw that she was provided with comfortable quarters, then he sought out the office of Kelley, Hickey & Co., on Sanson street.

Both of the first-mentioned members were present and listened eagerly to the boy's narration of the rescue.

Kelley then proposed that a raid be made on the Pine-street den, and, calling into requisition a squad of police, a descent was made straight-way.

Everything was found as it had been left the night before and handed over to the custody of the chief of police.

Among the captured effects were numerous tools and appliances which proved that Satan's Social had comprised as thorough and skillful a set of blacklegs and burglars as were ever banded together, having everything that mind could devise to further the needs of their nefarious calling.

Stolen goods to the value of a number of thousand dollars were recovered, and spies were placed in the neighborhood to capture any would-be purchasers who might come, but these confederates had evidently received timely warning, for none put in an appearance.

Evening dawned over the Quaker City, bringing with it a wild, windy rain-storm that caused the streets to look gloomy and deserted.

At the Banker mansion all preparations had been completed for the quiet marriage.

The hour for its consummation was eight.

About seven Ernest met Madge in the hall, and could but note the fact that she looked more regally beautiful than ever in a toilet of white satin, rare laces and gleaming diamonds.

"How many are to be present at the ceremony?" she asked, "and where will it take place? It seems very odd to not have a real brilliant wedding."

"That is out of the question," Ernest declared. "Uncle's illness would make such a proceeding unseemly, to say the least. The ceremony will take place in the parlor, and Dr. Fitch, Counselor Shields and Sambo will be present. If you have any young lady acquaintances you would like to have present, please send for them."

"I have not, Mr. Floyd; my cousin and yours, I suppose, will be here."

"Indeed! That will be nice."

"Will papa be able to be brought down?"

"That I do not know, as I have not consulted with the physician. I trust he may be able to be present."

Eight o'clock.

The grand parlor was brilliantly lighted. At one end of the apartment Ernest and Madge were seated, both looking rather pale and nervous. At a small marble table near the center of the room sat Lawyer Shields, while near him Joshua Banker was bolstered up in an easy-chair and looking greatly improved in health. Dr. Fitch attentively hovered near him.

At one side of the room Jack Fallon was seated; Dr. Sherman the officiating clergyman occupied a position just opposite, and Sambo stood near the door.

As the little cuckoo clock announced the hour of eight, the minister arose.

"If every one is present, I will marry these young people, now," he said, in his characteristic brisk way. "Please arise."

The request was obeyed, and Ernest and Madge joined hands.

The minister then proceeded to read the marriage service, and got only so far as to command all who knew aught why the marriage should not be consummated to come forward and speak or forever after hold their peace, when a deep sonorous voice cried:

"Hold! I forbid the bans!" and John P.

Kelley strode into the room, accompanied by Dan Hickey.

An audible curse fell from Jack Fallon's lips, and he made a leap for the nearest window; but for once, cunning rogue that he was, he was not quick enough, for the two sleuths were upon him, in an instant, and bore him to the floor, where they handcuffed him, easily, in spite of his struggles.

"What is the meaning of this proceeding?" Counselor Shields demanded, excitedly.

"It means that we arrest this man, Jack Fallon, for a series of crimes, not the least of which is that of conspiring to take the life of Mr. Joshua Banker, by poisoning; also of being chief of a gang of burglars and receivers of stolen goods, and also of attempt to murder one of his confederates!" Kelley cried.

"Tis is a damnable lie!" Fallon roared, furiously.

"Ob! no it ain't, Jacky! We have worlds of proof, and State prison stares you in the face just as surely as that the world endures!"

"That has nothing to do with this matter of the marriage!" Shields spoke up.

"I beg your pardon, sir. That young woman has been Fallon's confederate in his villainous scheme to get hold of the Banker property!" Dan said. "Furthermore, she has no legal right to marry Mr. Floyd, as she is the wife of Joshua Banker's valet—Butler, by name!"

"Tis false!" Madge screamed.

"Tis true! I searched the matter out, and procured from Butler your marriage certificate. Kelley, secure the woman, and then to Mr. Banker I will make a few explanations."

Kelley proceeded to arrest Madge, but before he could lay hands on her, she drew a stiletto from some part of her dress to drive it into her bosom; but Ernest caught at the uplifted arm, and the blow inflicted, though deep, was not then fatal.

She was led staggering from the room, only to consummate her suicide that night, by turning her face to the pillow and ceasing to breathe—a terrible end for a beautiful but most wicked woman.

Mr. Banker was terribly excited, but was prevailed upon to listen.

Hickey then proceeded to relate the incidents of the whole case, so that repetition of it here is not worth while.

The real Belle Banker was ushered in, and the greeting between father and daughter was warm, to say the least.

After a full conference of all parties, there was a wedding—the nuptials of Ernest and the real Belle were celebrated in earnest, much to the joy of all most concerned.

A little more will suffice to end our narrative of a remarkable case.

Perhaps we have erred in not giving the real names of those we have written of; but to have done so would have been to make the affairs of a fine old Philadelphia family too public.

Kelley, Hickey & Co., as is well known, have no need to fear having their names in print.

Joshua Banker, under Dr. Fitch's care, recovered, and has indeed a "sweet, sweet home," with his two children, as he calls Ernest and Belle.

Madge, and her mother, whose remains were discovered, received a quiet burial in Fernwood at Joshua Banker's expense.

Old Banker had suddenly disappeared, and it was suspected that he it was who had, by some mysterious means, been the cause of the death of his sinful wife.

When Jack Fallon's case came to trial, such an overwhelming avalanche of evidence was produced against him that he received prompt conviction, and a ten-year sentence at hard labor.

Among those who testified against him, and they were not a few, was Austin, whom he had attempted to bribe; and Kitty, whom he had thrown into the sewer. She had been but momentarily stunned, and Sewer Sam, who had followed Fallon, easily rescued her after the villain's hasty departure.

McGilligan and Grogan, and the others of the Satan's Social gang, are now breaking stone at Cherry Hill, with poor prospects of other occupation for some time to come.

The Dude has, in truth, mended his ways, and bids fair to become a respectable citizen.

As to our detectives, it is needless to add that they were well paid by Ernest and Mr. Banker, and although still in the business, it is not so much for the pecuniary benefit as to "see that justice be had tho' their he'vings should fall," as the "Co." party often remarks.

[By the way, let me say—in parenthesis—I hear that Sewer Sam is working up a "snap," and you may naturally look for its ventilation in the near future.]

THE END.

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